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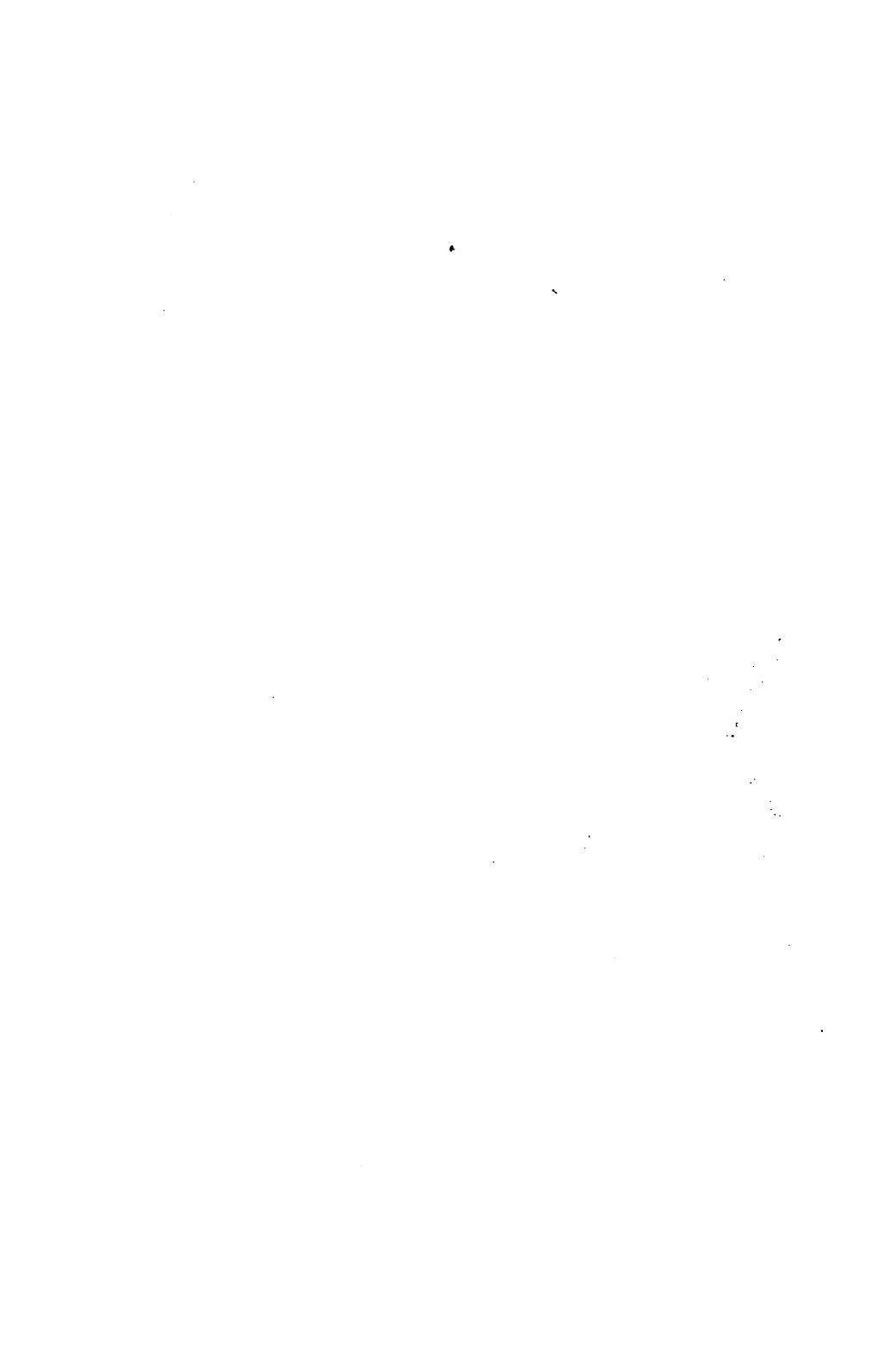




THE SACRISTAN'S HOUSEHOLD.

VOL. II.







The Herr Küster was rather wroth with him, and said he would that all the meddling fools who made the war had to fight.

THE
WILLISTON

THEATRE, BOSTON, MASS., AND NEW YORK.

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THE
SACRISTAN'S HOUSEHOLD.

A STORY OF LIPPE-DETMOLD.

BY
THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE,"
"MABEL'S PROGRESS," ETC.

WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARCUS STONE.



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE GROTEMBERG	PAGE 1
-----------------------------	-----------

CHAPTER XXII.

PARTING	17
-------------------	----

CHAPTER XXIII.

LIESCHEN IN THE LION's DEN	30
--------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW IT STRUCK THE UPPER HALF-DOZEN	44
--	----

CHAPTER XXV.

“WHO WANTS EGGS MUST BEAR THE HEN's CACKLING”	57
---	----

CHAPTER XXVI.

LIESCHEN'S LOVE-LETTER	PAGE 74
----------------------------------	---------

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE JUSTIZRATH IS "STRAIGHTFORWARD"	87
---	----

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO PHILOSOPHERS	108
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOPHIE	123
------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MOROCCO CASE	135
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOLDIERS IN THE SOUTH	149
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON THE BELFRY	161
-------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MAJOR'S PERPLEXITIES	179
------------------------------------	-----

CONTENTS.

vii

CHAPTER XXXIV.

	PAGE
A GLIMPSE OF THE TRUTH	192

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CHARCOAL-BURNER'S STORY	208
---------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“NOBLESSE OBLIGE”	223
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE GUARD IS RELIEVED	236
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION	251
----------------------	-----

THE SACRISTAN'S HOUSEHOLD.

A STORY OF LIPPE-DETMOLD.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE GROTEMBERG.

THE summit of the Grotenberg, on an evening of early spring, when the air on those bleak heights is still cold, is not altogether a pleasant spot. The great Hermann's Denkmal stands there. It is massive, as befits the place, and as, indeed, it needs must be to resist the blasts which assail it in the drear winter days and drearier nights. It is one day to be crowned by a colossal figure of Arminius, with sword and helmet, stretching out his victorious right arm over the scene of his struggle and his glory.

When sunshine and shadow chase each other over the landscape, and dapple the leafy forest paths like the hide of a deer, the Grotenberg is very beautiful. Close at hand are the great woods, and in the wide plain below, distance melts into distance, ever bluer and

more blue, and the land is dotted with many a town, hamlet, and village. Under the summer sunlight their walls and roofs show white and red, like scattered groups of wild flowers in a meadow. But early in the year, while the snow still lingers in shadowed nooks, and ere yet the forests have fully put forth their green waving plumes and pennons, the summit of the Grotenberg is a wild and dreary spot. Otto Hemmerich stood there, at the base of the Denkmal, and glanced round at intervals as though expecting some one. A strong, gusty wind brought sudden showers of rain now and again, and the chill drops were dashed against his face as though roughly sprinkled by giant fingers. The landscape was dim from mist and driving rain and from the gathering dusk. Black clouds, tattered at their edges by the wind, scudded rapidly across the sky, and where they broke or ceased, revealed no blue, but only fresh masses of grey vapour.

Otto's mood was in harmony with the aspect of Nature: sombre, almost gloomy,—yet, withal, having a dash of freshness, vigour, and movement. And in his mind,—as in the scene before him,—were wide, dim horizons, veiled and misty as yet, but which hope and fancy brightened with beauty and sunshine to come.

Within a week after Otto's return to Detmold, Herr

Schmitt went away. Before his departure he wrote a letter to the Justizrath von Schleppers, strongly recommending Otto for the post of Jäger, and urging the lawyer to lay Otto's case before the Prince. It may as well be stated at once that to this letter the Herr Justizrath vouchsafed no notice whatever. Two days before Schmitt left Detmold, Otto received an unexpected letter from Liese. Liese had never written a letter in all her life before, and nothing less than her strong love for Otto could have induced her to attempt such a feat. It was scrawled in a trembling hand, which had played sad havoc with the sharp, stiff German characters, and there were one or two failures in spelling,—but more, as it appeared, from excessive anxiety than from ignorance; for in several instances a word had been correctly written at first, and then partly erased and altered. This was the letter:—

“MY DEAR OTTO,

“I am afraid you may be surprised and sorry when you come again to the Herr Justizrath's, because I shall not be there, because I am at home again, because Cousin Hanne has been to see my mistress, and she was very angry about you. And Cousin Hanne says that now you are quite poor,”—the words “a penniless beggar” had been written and scratched out,

—“and I must not think of marrying you; and she spoke a good deal to the Herr Justizrath against you; and the Herr Justizrath went off to Horn and saw your uncle; and I am so vexed to the heart, dear Otto, that they should say things against you, because you are so good. But the Herr Justizrath has promised your uncle not to let you get into the Prince's service, and then they say you will have to do just whatever your uncle says; but I know you won't, and so does old Sophie, and I can't help crying when I think of it all, because it seems as if I brought you trouble. I am to stay at home now. Cousin Franz is very kind to me, but he says I am only a child and do not know my own mind; and Cousin Hanne does not scold me, but she speaks against you, and that is worse a thousand times. I remember what you said to me, Otto, and I will be true; but we must wait a long time. I don't mind so much when I think how much you said you loved me; but then when I remember that it is because of me that your uncle has turned you away, I almost feel afraid that it would have been better if you had not loved me, Otto. Please don't be angry,—I don't really think so. And even when I am crying to myself over my spinning, I can't help being glad in my heart because you are fond of me. I am afraid this is a very stupid letter, but you will forgive it, because I never

wrote to anybody before. I don't know when I shall see you again, dear Otto; but if you would write me a letter and send it to the sacristan's Sophie, she would give it to me. She is very sorry about you, and we talk of you together. I hope you do not think this sly of me, Otto, because I know you are so bold and true; but if you write me a letter to the farm, Cousin Hanne would see it, and I should not like that. Only if you think it would be wrong to send a letter for me to the sacristan's Sophie, I shall know that you know best. God bless you, dear Otto! Don't fret about me, and

“ I remain your own true love,

“ LIESCHEN.

“ The squirrel you gave me is very well, and I have brought his cage up into my room now, and I hang it outside of the window under the eaves, and he likes it very much, and I do believe he knows your name, for when I say ‘ Otto ’ ever so softly he turns his head and looks at me. Please forgive this silly letter, dear Otto. I love you very much ! ”

Otto standing there on the Grotenberg in the raw spring evening, with gusty flaws of wind from many points of the compass beating on his red-brown cheeks, took this letter from his breast-pocket, and read it for the twentieth time. Poor little Lieschen in disgrace

for his sake, and the farmer holding out no encouragement to bid them hope!

Twice or three times since the letter had reached him Otto had called at the Justizrath's house; had been early and late to the land-steward's office in the main street of Detmold. At each place, and on each occasion, the same answer awaited his demand for an interview with Von Schleppers;—the Herr Justizrath was engaged and could not see him. The Herr Major von Groll was absent on private business. The Justizrath had full power to act for him during his absence. The immediate prospect had become alarming. Schmitt's house was shut up, the stock and furniture sold; and Otto stood in the streets of Detmold, with three thalers in his pocket, and without a roof over his head. But he had taken a resolution.

It has been hinted that Otto was supported in his first boyish resistance to Simon Schnarcher's tyranny by a touch of the family obstinacy. Simon, we know, was very obstinate. Otto was,—well, what in a good cause we call firm. Yes; Otto was undoubtedly very firm. The idea of submission did not even cross his mind. The word dropped by Liese about his uncle and the Justizrath combining to bend his will by closing to him all paths of employment, did by no means mollify the temper of his thoughts. His uncle should see, and

every one should see, that he was no weak boy, to be led hither or driven thither ; but a man, able and resolved to act for himself. Detmold was a small place, and small tyrannies might be powerful therein ; but Detmold was not the world ;—Detmold was not even all Fatherland.

“There you are, Otto,” said a deep voice in his ear. “I saw the three crosses on the oak tree last evening, and I leave you to guess whether I was glad to see them or not. I have been lingering about the glade for the last hour or more, and then I thought I would come on a bit higher and look for you.”

Otto grasped the charcoal-burner’s hand. “Yes, Cousin Joachim. I did not want to go away without saying farewell to the only one left of my blessed mother’s kith and kin. I came up to the Denkmal to have a last look over the dear old land.”

“A last look !” exclaimed Joachim, startled. “What do you mean ?”

“Well ; not quite the last look, either, I hope ; but once turn your back on anything in this world, and who knows whether you may ever see it again ? I am going to leave Detmold.” Then, seeing Joachim about to speak, he added hastily, “Not Detmold only, but the Principality,—this district altogether.”

“Herr in Himmel !”

“Ah, kinsman,” pursued Otto, half smiling, half sad, “that first day that we met in the forest you were half inclined to reproach me with my prosperity. Well, no, perhaps;—not exactly to reproach me; but to look upon me as one who could scarcely be expected to feel for a poor fellow like yourself. Isn’t that true?”

“Perhaps, at first,—at the very first; but after you began to speak to me I knew you had the true blood in your veins. Your father and mother were right good people, and you are their son!”

“Thank you, cousin. After all, then, mine is a better inheritance than land or gold. I’m sure I hope so, for,—look how the world goes! At this moment I am as poor as yourself,—nay, poorer, for you have, at least, a trade to earn your bread by. As for me, I am good for nought that I can get a chance of doing. I have quarrelled with my uncle, and he has ordered me out of his doors, and told me plainly that I shall never be the better for a penny of his money.”

“Quarrelled with your uncle!—Turned you out of doors! Ah, but such quarrels are healed often enough; and as for your uncle’s threat, he is choleric and old. He will change his mind before long.”

“No, Joachim; you are mistaken there. Uncle Schnarcher is not one to change his mind in a hurry;

and as I have some of the same blood in my veins that he has, I am not changeable either. But I don't wish to say harsh things of the old man. God knows I'm more sorry than angry when I think of it all! What I have to do now is to think of some way of earning my bread." Then Otto confided to his cousin, as they paced side by side through the glade, how he had an intention of going for a soldier, and how,—albeit not thirsting for military glory, and willing enough to serve his fatherland as a peaceful citizen,—he felt that he could conscientiously shoulder a rifle in the Prussian ranks; and how he was moreover encouraged in the project by the strong conviction that his father would have approved such a step.

Joachim listened in dismay. The political parts of the question, the rights and wrongs of Germany, the tendency to unification, and the hope that Prussia would advance wisely on a path of constitutional liberalism, were all as far beyond Joachim's comprehension as they were beyond the comprehension of the poor hinds who left Waldeck to enlist, simply because their lives were too hard not to make the chance of a bullet a small matter to set against the certainty of sufficient bread and meat. But what the charcoal-burner fully understood was, that if Otto turned soldier in these stirring war times, he would run a

considerable risk of being shot. "Ach behüte!" he exclaimed, in horror. Go for a soldier! O lad! what put such a thought into your head? Why the folks do say there will be war before long!"

"Ay, that they do."

"Why then—then—don't you see? you might be killed, or lose an arm, or a leg, or—Oh, Otto, think better of it!"

Otto smiled. "If I judged only by what you are saying now, Cousin Joachim, I should set you down as a poor faint-hearted fellow, and think you wanted to make me one too. Would you be so desperately afraid of the chance of being shot?"

"I? Ah no, not I! But then, that is so different. What harm would it do if a stray bullet put an end to me? Now you have friends, youth, hope, and a sweetheart who loves you."

Otto winced, and then sighed. "Poor Lieschen! Poor, soft darling! But she would be braver than they think for. How many true lovers,—nay, how many husbands and wives,—are forced to part! And after all, I should not be much more separated from her then than I am now. Besides, what am I to do? Would it be better for her that I should stay and beg or starve in Detmold? My uncle has interest with these stewards who stand in the Prince's place here;

and he has made up his mind to shut every door in my face except the one door that he chooses I shall pass through. Come, come, Cousin Joachim, may-be's and might-be's help no man to a dinner. I would rather stay and be a Jäger in the Detmold woods if I could ; but as I cannot, let us say no more about it." Otto's manner was very trenchant and resolute at times, and the poor charcoal-burner looked almost overawed by the gaze of those clear, unflinching, blue eyes.

A less resolute man than Joachim Müller it would have been hard to find. You could plainly discover timidity, hesitation, and self-distrust in his wavering glance, in his slow, uncertain speech, in the purposeless way in which his hands wandered now and again over his matted elf-locks, and played nervously with any tag or end of his ragged garments. And yet there was too, at times, a sullen defiance about the man. But he had ceased to show this to Otto. "You know best," said Joachim looking down. "I haven't made such a Meister-stück of my own life that I dare set up to advise others."

" Nay ; I don't know that, kinsman. But, you see, the pressing truth is that every man of us must live his own life for himself. Whether it turn out Meister-stück or Pfuscherei,—masterpiece or botch,—we must shape it each man for himself, according to the gifts

that are in us. Now that is what Uncle Schnarcher cannot understand."

Joachim looked wistfully into the bright, self-confident, youthful face at his side. Dumb, confused thoughts struggled in his mind;—a conviction that he had not lived his own life, as Otto phrased it; that it had been shaped for him by very strong ruthless pressure from without. But he could not have put the thoughts into words. He did not even attempt to do so. All at once he said, "Could you not wait awhile? Must you go at once?"

"Wait! What for, in Gottes Namen?"

"For—I don't know. Something might happen——"

Otto burst into a hearty peal of laughter, "My good Joachim! Yes; something might happen. Nay, I am sure something would happen. By dint of waiting and lingering idly here my three thalers would dwindle into two thalers,—one thaler,—no thaler at all! I should have to beg my way into Westphalia. My uncle would be strengthened by my irresolution, and feel surer and surer that I should yield at last. Lieschen, bless her! would grow heartsick day by day between hoping and fearing. And as to myself! Lord, I should fall ill of a fever, I verily believe! Yes; several things would happen, Cousin

Joachim. But at this present moment I must consider where I am to lay my head this night. I slept yesterday at the Blue Pigeon in Detmold. But I cannot afford to stay there. A kreutzer more or less makes a great difference to me now. I packed the few clothes I need in this knapsack, and I mean to seek a bed at the little public-house on the high road beyond the clearing there."

Joachim was silent for a moment or two, and then said hesitatingly: "It seems a strange thing for me to offer shelter to any one; but,—if you didn't mind,—I know where you could have a roof over your head, and a dry bed of leaves to rest on. And, what is stranger: it is in the old house where you and yours lived happy for many a year, and where I used to come a poor bare-foot boy, and was always sure of a bellyful of food and a kind word."

"In our old house! What do you mean?"

"Well, the lodge has been shut up and deserted a long time. The Prince is away, and they seem not to care about keeping it in order. I found a way of getting in, and I often sleep there. As far as I know, that can do no harm to man or beast; but I suppose they'll hunt me out, and make a crime of it. I saw the land-steward, Von Groll, prying about the place one day. However, for to-night there's shelter. It is

all I can say. And, after all, it is but giving you your own." The idea pleased Otto mightily. It would be sad, and yet sweet, to pass his last night in Detmold under the old roof-tree. He at once accepted Joachim's offer. The latter was despatched to the little roadside tavern for a provision of food and a bottle of wine. They made a blazing fire of dry branches on the long-disused hearth-stone, and chatted of old times.

To Joachim the occasion was a sort of carouse. In spite of his many anxieties for the future, and in spite of his bitter memories of the past, he enjoyed the flavour of the wine, the warmth and light of the fire, and the unwonted luxury of companionship. The charcoal-burner and his cousin talked far into the night. Three or four times in the course of their conversation, Joachim was tempted to reveal his interview with the Justizrath, and to tell Otto the sad story which the sight of Liese's fair face had brought back so vividly to his memory. But his natural hesitation and timidity held him back, even when the words were on his lips. The Justizrath had frightened him, as that astute personage conjectured. But Puss-in-Boots had by no means understood fully all the grounds of Joachim's fear. In the society of Otto Hemmerich the poor charcoal-burner had tasted once

more the cordial draught of human trust and fellowship. Otto looked kindly at him, took his blackened hand, treated him as a honest man and a kinsman. Now Joachim knew enough of his young cousin to be sure that on the first hint of such a story as he had to tell, Otto would go boldly and openly to the Justizrath and to farmer Lehmann ; would search out the truth in his unwavering fearless way ; and then—— ! Then, whatever might be the result of the inquiries as regarded Lieschen's birth, one thing was certain ; Otto must learn that of Joachim Müller which would suffice to cover the latter with disgrace in the opinion of nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand. Would Otto be the thousandth unshakeable man ? Then came the thought, “ and for what should I risk losing my only friend ? For a dream,—a resemblance, —the phantom of a dead face ! I will search, I will watch, I will strive to do right. But as yet, for this one night, let me keep the regard of this honest heart. To-morrow—yes ; to-morrow, before he goes, I will tell him.” So they talked, and the minutes flowed past, and the opportunity floated away.

Excitement and the unusually late vigil combined to make Joachim thoroughly weary and drowsy when at length he stretched himself on his bed of dry leaves on one side of the hearth, having prepared a similar couch

in the warmest corner for his cousin. He slept profoundly throughout the remainder of the night, and long after the sun had been sending bright golden shafts through the chinks in the crazy shutter, and had made the shadow of some tender spring foliage tremble on the dusty wall. He began to dream of a snake hissing in deep grass. He heard the reptile's angry sibilations, and was seeking for it anxiously, when he awoke to find the room empty of all tenant save himself, the door open, and two or three dry leaves rustling hither and thither on the floor with a whispering sound, moved by the morning breeze. Otto was gone.

CHAPTER XXII.

PARTING.

LIESE LEHMANN's lattice window beneath the broad eaves was open betimes in the morning. Early hours are usual all over Germany, and naturally the habits of life in the country are more primitive than in the towns. The sun never surprised Liese's head upon the pillow. Long before his rays peeped in at the casement, the active little maiden was up and away from her chamber, and helping Frau Hanne in the various labours of the household. All tasks which demanded rather dainty neatness than strength were usually confided to Lieschen's fingers. Her hands fell upon all they touched as softly as dew falls upon the earth, and they seemed to brighten and beautify common things, even as the dew brightens the humblest way-side weed-blossoms.

The silver mist was rolling up from the meadows of Lehmann's farm, toward the higher woodlands, when Lieschen threw open the little diamond-paned window.

Its iron framework rattled crazily and scattered a shower of bright drops from the twigs of the vine, whose tender leaves were beginning to bud forth. "Otto," said Lieschen's soft voice, softly; "dear Otto." It was her morning salutation to the squirrel, whose beady, black eye glanced quickly on her at the sound. Liese put her thumb and finger within the wooden bars of his cage, and held a hazel nut to the little russet, fur-coated creature, that nibbled and gnawed enjoyingly. "Otto," she murmured again; "dearest Otto."

"I am here." The words, uttered almost in a whisper, which yet was audible in the stillness of the dawn, made Liese start back terrified, whilst a flush, as soft and pink as the reflections on a white cloud at sunset, spread over her face and throat.

"Herr in Himmel! Is it you, Otto? truly and really?" she said, leaning out over the window-sill. Yes; there stood Otto, truly and really, looking up eagerly at the sweet face that bent above him. "But how?—why?—Oh, I am so glad!" And then some bright tears stole from the eyes where they had been lurking, and falling, mingled with the dewdrops upon the vine.

"Don't cry, my own Lieschen! I can't bear to see it."

“It’s with joy, Otto ;—joy to see you again. It seemed such a long, long, weary time since I had spoken with you ! And writing is not the same thing, is it ?”

“Listen, heart’s treasure,” said Otto, coming close under the lattice, and speaking in a low voice ; “I do not want any one to know that I am here. The farmer would only talk and argue, and when one has made up one’s mind to do a thing, there’s no use in wasting words about it. And I have made up my mind to go away.” Liese grew very pale, and her hand which leant on the window-sill, tightened its grasp ; but she answered never a word. “There is only one reason why going away should be hard for me—the separation from my darling little promised wife. But you know, dear Lieschen, that we are separated now as it is.” Still Liese did not answer, but her lips trembled as though she would have spoken.

“Come, Herzensliebe, don’t be so dumb and downcast. You think I am brave, but the truth is, Lieschen, that I reckon upon you to keep up my courage.”

This appeal to the girl’s spirit of self-sacrifice was not made in vain. She kept back her tears by a great effort, though she could not stay the quivering of her mouth. “I will try, Otto. Are you,—are you going far away ?”

"Not out of Fatherland, my darling."

"And for,—for,—ach Gott!—for a long time, Otto!"

"I hope not, my best one. My own good Lieschen, you will listen calmly to what I have to say, won't you?"

Then Otto told her of his project. He was not very skilful at any long preparation or preamble. Perhaps that was as well; for no preparation or preamble could have sweetened the bitter of what he had to say; and it was best to tell the truth which must be told quickly. He spoke as hopefully and as eloquently as he could, dwelling on the bright side of his plan, and showing clearly that there was no chance of advancement or even employment for him in Detmold. Liese listened tremblingly, and with a sick sinking of the heart. Could he not do as his uncle desired? Could he not learn to be a tradesman, and live peacefully at home? These thoughts flitted through her mind; but her first impulse was to shut them in there. It was a feeling betwixt maiden pride and the timid reserve of a nature shrinkingly sensitive, which prompted her to be silent. But then there was a stronger feeling than this in that meek, innocent breast,—the strength of a deep, pure, first love.

Little Liese's heart was loyal to the core; and she

remembered,—what had he ever said to her that she did not remember?—how Otto had always urged her to be sincere and frank with him, and how he had said there could be no right love without perfect truth. Otto could not for the life of him have comprehended the subtle reserves and strange, wayward timidities that sometimes made Liese's lips close like a shut rose-bud. His character was like the noon-day, broad-beaming, bright, and clear; and what does noon know of tremulous silver star-gleams, and dim twilight shadows?

But Liese loved him dearly; so she spoke. “Otto, you know I always think you right and wise. I always think so; but I sometimes do not understand why;—please do not mind my crying, if the tears did not come, I should choke; but I will go on in a moment. There. Well, dear Otto, why should you not do as your uncle Schnarcher wishes? It is not for myself I speak. But you know that, by your own heart, don't you, Otto? I am quite sure you believe me. But ought you not to,—to yield a little to the Herr Küster? And though you don't like trade, still, you know, Otto, people ought not just to think of what they like. Don't be angry, and,—Oh, Otto, Otto, you are going away, and I may never see you any more!” The last words were wailed out in a plaintive, broken tone, and the poor child let fall her head on her arms, that were

resting folded on the window-sill, and stifled her sobs behind the thick, soft tresses which fell over her like a veil.

In an instant Otto had unstrapped his knapsack, and thrown it on the ground, and then with light, sure foot, he began to clamber upward, holding by the strong rusty iron nails and clamps which sustained the vine. Liese felt a hand part the silky chestnut locks from her brow, and looked up with blurred eyes and piteous, curved underlip, to find Otto's face close to her own, and Otto's voice in her ear.

With one arm and hand he clung to the old black, knotted stem of the vine, and with the other he took both little Lieschen's hands, and held them fast. "Darling! darling!" he cried, "you break my heart. Don't cry so, mein Schatz, or I shall think I did wrong in coming to say farewell to you, and that it would have been better had I done as I at first thought of doing, and gone away without seeing you again, and so spared the pain of this parting. You make me reproach myself when I see you suffer so. But I could not bear to deceive you. Tell me that I did right, Lieschen!"

"Yes, yes,—a thousand times yes!" she sobbed out.

"That's my own best Lieschen! I must tell you all. My uncle Schnarcher would be softened by

nothing short of my giving you up. That is the truth, Lieschen. I might yield to him on almost every other point, but on that point how can I yield?"

Liese shook her head. "I am right sorry that I am not better worth all the trouble I cause you, dear Otto."

"No human being could be better worth it to me," he answered, with a proud, fond glance.

"N—no," she said falteringly. "But then that is not because I am so good, but because you love me." You see little Liese never dreamed of urging her lover to give her up, and by so doing secure his worldly advancement. She could not do so, because she simply and literally believed him when he told her that, having loved and been beloved by her, all the hopes and happiness of his life were inextricably bound up with hers. Otto's love was a great and wonderful blessing. It had come to her as the sunlight came, without any special merit of her own. But having come, she accepted it, and was grateful for it, and believed in it without any mental sophistication.

"I mean to walk through Westphalia towards the Rhine," said Otto. "But I came so far out of my way just for the chance of seeing you. At first I thought I would only take a peep at the old place, and say a silent Lebewohl in my heart. But then your

dear face shone out of the window, and——. Do you know, Lieschen, it really did seem to shine, it was so white and fair in the dark room there.” Liese could not smile at her fond lover’s flattery, but she squeezed his hand with her little clinging fingers. “I shall write to you, of course, Herzensliebe. And old Sophie,—bless her!—will be good to you. Keep your heart up, dear love; let me see you brave and calm before I go.”

Liese disengaged her hands from his, and clasped her arms around his neck, holding him somewhat away from her; and there came a strangely resolute look into her meek eyes. “Dear Otto, I am not,—I will try not to be,—selfish. You are good and strong. I am weak. But there is one thing which the weakest and poorest of God’s human creatures has power to do;—I can pray. Our Father, bless my Otto, and guard him, and give him back safe to me. Amen.”

Her arms tightened their clasp and drew him towards her, and the two young faces met in a long passionate kiss. Then there was silence, broken only by stifled sobs, in the little chamber. Presently the squirrel, moving restlessly from side to side of his cage, roused his mistress, who had sank on her knees by the side of her bed, with her head buried in the patchwork coverlet.

Liese rose, dried her eyes, bathed her hot cheeks with cold water, and combed out her hair, all damp with tears. Then she arranged the humble room neatly, cleansed the squirrel's cage, and went down the ladder-like staircase into the kitchen. All that had passed seemed like a dream. She went through her daily round of duties mechanically, and in silence. Sometimes, amid the monotonous burr of the afternoon spinning, the question arose confusedly in her mind, "What is it? Why is my heart so heavy?" And she would, by an effort of her will, forbid, as it were, the answer to frame itself into words. She would not say to herself, "Otto is gone. I have seen Otto, and have bade him farewell."

But at night, when the long day was over, and she was alone in her little chamber free to weep and to give way to her sorrow, poor little Lieschen threw herself down on the bed, and shed a flood of salt tears, and sobbed, and clasped her hands together, and exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "He is gone, he is gone, he is gone!" over and over again, until sleep touched her swollen eyelids, and calmed the beating of her loving heart. The days went by in their usual track. That track could not be said to be a quiet one wherein Frau Hanne Lehmann lived and moved, but it was monotonous and secure. Liese's sad, pale face and

gentle voice lower and more subdued than ever, and the nervous start with which, at some chance word or hasty footfall, she would rouse herself from a day-dream, were not much observed at the farm. Franz and Hanne, and old Claus, the waggoner, and Lotte and Marthe, and even the little barefooted gooseherd, all knew quite well that the girl was in love, and that her love was not a prosperous one. Each and all of these different individuals,—with the exception of Hanne,—testified in his or her fashion kindly sympathy for the little maiden ; but they did not especially mark the increased despondency which had weighed on Liese's spirits since the morning of her parting with Otto.

I have excepted Hanne from the number of those who were kindly sympathetic to Liese. In truth, the Hausfrau behaved with the strange unaccountable waywardness that belonged to her. Hanne could not be said to be incapable of kindness ; and being capable of kindness, there seemed to be every reason why she should display that feeling to the orphan girl. Liese was docility itself. She obeyed Hanne with unquestioning promptitude. She even,—with that instinctive appreciation of character which belongs to some of the simplest, as well as to some of the slyest of her sex,—refrained from any marked display of affection towards

her cousin Franz in his wife's presence. And she contrived, as far as in her lay, that the farmer should not distinguish her by any peculiar indulgence. But all would not do. The girl's very softness seemed to irritate Hanne. There was a jealous suspicion in her mind that Liese was looked on as a victim, and was more beloved by all the household than she had ever been before.

"It's nothing but sulks and stubbornness," Hanne would say sharply. "I hate such ways. Ach! Es ekelt mich! I'm fairly sick of her nonsense. What is it she wants? What is the matter with her? Sweethearts, indeed! If she had the trouble some folks have had to go through, she might talk." Then, with a sudden change of mood, she would by-and-by bewail the hardness of heart which kept Liese from confiding her sorrows to her nearest female friend "who had always behaved to her like a mother." "I think it unnatural, — downright unnatural!" she would exclaim, with the angry sparkle dancing in her grey eyes. "I'm a woman as well as she. And I was a young lass once, and I suppose I knew what it was to be fond of my sweetheart, too! To be sure I didn't fly in the face of Providence, and take up with a wrong-headed vagabond, who couldn't for the life of him stick to any decent employment. But still I was young,

and I had my feelings. And I suppose Liese is not such a superfine lady but what I could understand hers: —ay, and maybe, give her good counsel, too, if she'd condescend to speak, as she ought. But, no; deuce a word. Meek looks in plenty: and 'yes, Cousin Hanne,' and 'no, Cousin Hanne,' but as to proper trust and confidence, and dutifulness according to the Scriptures, —no, no! Mein Fräulein shuts her little, silly-looking mouth like a spring lock.—Snap! Now open it who can! For real hard, tough obstinacy, nothing can match your gentle soft folks."

The circumstance that she had repelled and disdained all attempt at confidential intercourse between herself and Liese on the subject of Otto, did not occur to Hanne. Or if it did occur to her, it did not suffice to justify the girl. Such inconsistencies were very common with the Hausfrau, whose scorn of reason was utter.

Liese's chief solace and comfort was to talk with the sacristan's Sophie about the absent one whom they both loved so well. The sacristan's habits were, as he often boasted, "regular as clockwork:" so that it was possible to reckon surely upon finding old Sophie alone at certain hours of the day. Liese was not always able to take advantage of these opportunities to run down the by-lane leading to Schnarcher's dwelling, and say a

few words to the old woman. Still she did contrive to see her pretty often. And then, too, Sophie would sometimes trot up to the farm to visit Hanne. Sophie had managed to propitiate the Hausfrau by asking her advice on the treatment of certain ailments which had broken out amongst the sacristan's poultry. Simon Schnarcher himself was in high favour with Frau Lehmann, as being a good, rigid, disagreeable person, who strongly asserted his own will,—and who had never hitherto crossed hers. Liese had taken good care to avoid coming into the presence of the Herr Küster, of whom she stood in great awe. But she was destined to undergo the ordeal of an interview with him; and the manner of it I purpose to relate in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LIESCHEN IN THE LION'S DEN.

ONE fine bright evening, after the early supper at the farm was over, and Liese, having seen the cows and goats milked and housed for the night, was leaning over the farm-yard paling, and looking pensively at the western sky, it came into her head that she would employ her hour of leisure in paying a visit to the sacristan's Sophie. "There chimes half-past six o'clock, by St. Mary's," she said to herself. "By the time I get to the cottage the Herr Küster will be off to the Pied Lamb. He always goes round by the street, so I am sure not to meet him. Who knows but Sophie may have a letter for me?"

This, indeed, was the secret hope at the bottom of her heart, every time she saw Sophie. Lieschen sped down the lane, bravely stepping with her little stoutly-shod feet through its splashy mire. There had been a soft shower just before sunset, and the dank dock leaves

and nettles in the lane were dripping with rain-drops. There was a fresh smell of budding green things in the air, mingled with the spicy breath that was wafted from the forest, where the young plants had been sweetened and refreshed by the rain. A clear-voiced throstle balanced himself on the bending bough of an elder tree which peeped over the hedge. He sang a loud jubilant song ; stretching his little throat, and pouring out quavering, sweet cadences, with every now and then a note that was almost harsh in its strenuous eagerness. His little brown body looked like a roundish black speck against the red sunset sky, which made the leaves and branches show like delicate Gothic tracery. And the bough danced up and down; and the bird swayed, and sang, and then ceased all at once with a delicious, soft, flutelike warble ; and that was "good night."

Almost as the throstle's song was over, Liese reached the gate of the sacristan's garden. It was only latched, and she entered the garden unhesitatingly, and went along the narrow pathway between rows of gooseberry-bushes and odorous kitchen herbs, to the house. Here, too, there were neither bolts nor bars to overcome. The house door stood a-jar, and Liese went into the kitchen, having first carefully cleansed her mud-stained shoes with a wisp of damp grass.

The room was neat and tidy as usual. Certainly it was not so irreproachably and specklessly clean as Frau Lehmann's kitchen. Liese's well-trained eyes detected dust and soils here and there, such as Hanne would have considered fatal to the reputation of any housewife. But then there was not such a house for cleanliness as Hanne Lehmann's in the Principality ; where,—especially in the country parts,—spotless neatness does by no means prevail.

There was, too, a bare look about the sacristan's kitchen ; a cheerless appearance of everything being penitulously cut down and limited to the strictly necessary. In Otto's school days there had always been,—despite Sophie's protests,—some sign of his presence to be found about the place. Sometimes it was a litter of leather cuttings wherewith Otto had been manufacturing a collar for the blacksmith's poodle. Sometimes chips and shavings of wood, the remains of the famous squirrel's cage, of which he had been so proud. Sometimes a great leafy bough of elder, or lilac, or laburnum, or a trailing branch of honeysuckle disposed so as to frame the three-cornered looking-glass, that was stuck so high on the wall as to offer no temptation to the vanity of mortals of ordinary stature. Sometimes it was but his cloth cap and pile of school books,—among which be sure there was a volume of poetic selections

from Claudius, Pfeffel, Burger, and so forth,—thrown carelessly on the wooden dresser. But now there were no such accidental suggestions of youth, and that outside world where birds and beasts and trees and flowers grew and flourished. Everything was in its place, and the air seemed heavy with silence.

Liese looked round the desolate room, and sighed. Sophie was not there. Liese concluded that the old woman was in the poultry-yard, or else busy in the outhouse milking the goats. She would wait for Sophie; and, meanwhile, it would be a good work to rub the dusty window-panes bright and clear. So Liese took up a cloth that lay on the dresser, and, trotting to the low casement, was about to set to work, when a sound struck her ear, which so startled her that she stood stock-still in a moment, with the duster in her upraised hand. The sound was the sacristan's voice, calling from the adjoining room, which was his bed-chamber, and opened out of the kitchen.

“Sophie, Sophie, Sophie! Come here, woman! Do you think I don't hear you clattering about there?” The sacristan's tones were as sharp as ever; but they were feeble and querulous, and like those of a man in pain.

Liese literally could not answer. She stood there

with her heart thumping against her side, and her face changing from pale to red, and from red to pale.

“Come here, I say, Sophie! Did you get the apothecary’s stuff? Herr in Himmel!—why don’t you come? I’ve dropped my glasses, and the pillow is all awry, and you know I can’t move to help myself.” Then followed a groan, partly of impatience, partly of pain.

“Poor old man!” thought Liese. He has his rheumatism bad and can’t go out. And there he lies helpless, and——Oh, dear! what shall I do?”

Another groan decided her. “Well, he can but scold me,” she told herself; “and I can’t bear to hear him complaining with no one to help him.” So, calling up all her courage, she entered the chamber.

The sacristan’s bed was in a recess in the wall, nearly impervious to light and air, and was hung round with curtains of a staring red and black pattern. The old man lay in it, propped up by pillows. A huge Bible was open before him, and the horn-rimmed spectacles, without which he could not see to read a word, had dropped on to the coverlet out of reach of his crippled rheumatic hand. The pillow which supported his head was, as he had declared, all awry, and he was twisted into a strained, uncomfortable position. The Herr Küster had always been an object of great

awe to Lieschen from her earliest years ; but now, as she looked at his haggard, yellow face, and saw the expression of suffering in his sunken eyes, all feeling towards him, except pity, went out of her heart. She forgot even the dislike and contempt in which he held her, in a compassionate desire to soothe his pain. The old man's face was turned from the door, and, as it was impossible for him to look round, he did not perceive who it was who had entered ; but, supposing it to be Sophie, began grumbling at her delay in answering his call.

Liese did not reply. Standing behind him, and still out of sight, she commenced lightly and gently to raise and smooth his pillows, and to place his head in a less uneasy position. All the while she was doing so, Simon Schnarcher continued to growl and snarl ; but he was evidently relieved by the change of posture ; and, when she had finally settled the cushions so as to support him comfortably, he drew a long breath and closed his eyes. " Give me a sup of broth," he said, without opening his eyes. " I feel to want food ; and though it was on the table there by my side, I couldn't take it, because my hand has got so bad since you've been out that I can't hold the spoon. Ach so ! My head's a bit easier. I thought my neck would be broke a while ago."

Liese took up the basin full of half-cold broth, and ran with it into the kitchen, where some smouldering embers were still struggling for life in the cooking-stove. She blew the embers into a red glow, and heated the broth, and carried it back to the sacristan's bedside. His eyes were still closed, but he was not sleeping.

"You must feed me, Sophie," he said feebly. "Have you got the spoon? Lord, how silent you're grown! Generally, you can chatter fast enough. And the stuff for rubbing my shoulder;—where's that?" By this time Liese had put one arm under the pillow, so as to support his head, and with the other was preparing to lift a spoonful of broth to the old man's lips, when he opened his eyes, and, looking down at the smooth youthful fingers within an inch of his face, cried out suddenly, "Hulloa! Was in Gottes Namen!—Why, what is this?"

"I ain't Sophie, please," said Liese, trembling.

"Who are you?—who are you?—Who the devil are you, I say?" exclaimed the old man, vainly trying to turn his head so as to see her face.

Liese moved forward within his range of vision. "I'm a—a—girl from Frau Hanne Lehmann's, Herr Küster," she answered,—not venturing, in her timidity, to pronounce her own name, which she fancied must

be so hateful in Schnarcher's ears. "I came to see Sophie, but she wasn't at home; and I heard you call; —and, if you wouldn't mind taking a spoonful of broth, I've just made it nice and hot, and put some crumb of bread in it;—and I'll go away directly you tell me."

The recess in which the bed stood was so dark that it was with difficulty old Simon could distinguish the girl's face. Whether he really did not recognise her, or whether he merely affected not to do so, Liese could not tell at the moment; but, somewhat to her surprise, he made an assenting sign with his eyes, and suffered her to feed him with spoonful after spoonful of the warm broth, until the basin was empty. Emboldened by this passive behaviour, Liese ventured to draw back the heavy curtain of the bed so as to allow the yellow sunset-light to fall on the pages of the big Bible. She then took up the horn-rimmed spectacles and placed them on the sacristan's nose; and, finally, she opened the window a little way; and the cool air, and the scent of the rain-dropped plants in the garden, came pouring into the close room.

Simon Schnarcher had a thoroughly German dread of fresh air. "Shut the window!" he cried fretfully. "Do you want to give me my death? Where is Sophie? Why do strange folks come interfering in my house? I don't allow it."

Without a word Liese closed the window again softly and quietly. But already the atmosphere of the room was improved and freshened. The sacristan felt that it was so. He looked furtively at the girl's sweet face, on which even his keen unfriendly eye could detect no trace of ill-humour; and the thought forced itself into his mind that there had been something like ingratitude in his scolding speech.

However, he said nothing. Turning his eyes on the open page of the Bible before him, he read, or pretended to read, in silence. Liese shrank away into a corner, out of sight. She did not like to leave the old man quite alone; and, as he had not bade her begone, she intended to wait there until Sophie should return. Presently she perceived that he had read to the bottom of a page, but was unable to turn the leaf. She rose softly, and did it for him. This time the sacristan uttered a little grunt which seemed to be intended for thanks.

After another pause of silence, Schnarcher muttered, without raising his eyes from the book, "So you come from Lehmann's farm, eh? I suppose the folks there know somewhat of my grand-nephew's doings. He has not dared to come back to me. No, no. He knows better! He knows that when Simon Schnarcher, sacristan, says a thing, he means it; and that his word

shall be law in his own household, as long as he has breath to speak it." Liese was greatly surprised. Sophie had always told her that the sacristan had furiously forbidden all allusion to Otto in his presence, and had obstinately refrained from making such allusion himself.

Liese replied in a low voice, "The Herr Küster's nephew is gone for a soldier. He means to enlist in the Prussian army."

It was all she could do to get the words out steadily, and when she had spoken them there was again blank silence in the room. So still was everything, that they presently heard old Sophie's slow footstep coming along the road, while she was yet at some distance. Then the latch clicked, and the wooden gate fell back on its hinges, and Sophie was heard hobbling up the garden path.

"Draw the bed-curtains again, and go into the kitchen, will you?" said the sacristan harshly. "Take off my glasses first, and wipe them," he added, as Liese was about to withdraw. She obeyed, and took up a corner of her apron to rub the spectacles with. The glasses were wet with tears.

"Dear heart, child," cried Sophie breathlessly, hurrying into the kitchen, "you here? O Lord! and the Herr Küster——"

"Sophie, Sophie!" called her master, "have you got back at last? Where's the stuff for my shoulder? What have you been doing all this time?"

Sophie bustled into the bed-room. "Ach Himmel, Herr Küster! I had to wait more than three-quarters of an hour at the Apotheke. Herr Peters was out, and I wasn't going to let that boy of his make up the liniment. Not I, thankye! But here it is at last. Shall I lift up your head a bit?"

"Leave me alone, can't ye? You're as rough as a man, and as weak as an old woman. Ach! Ach! Gently! Do you think I'm made of iron? My head was right enough a minute ago. Where's that—that lass of Frau Lehmann's? Call her in to help. She has some notion that rheumatic folks don't bear to be handled like logs of wood."

Sophie stared at him in a maze of bewilderment. "The—the—lass, Herr Küster?" she stammered.

"Lord have mercy on me, what an old fool you are growing, Sophie!" exclaimed the sacristan, in a tone of exquisite irritation. "That lass who was here just now. Call her in."

Liese had heard, and was already standing by his bed. "Can I do anything, Herr Küster?" she asked quietly.

"Yes; of course you can. Where's the liniment?

See if you can rub my shoulder a bit. Sophie can't. It's no use asking her,—not the least. Ach lieber Herr! So. That's the way. Like that, do you see, Sophie? Firm, and yet soft. Not starting back and leaving off every time I wince;—just as though a man with the rheumatism could help wincing!"

In such sentences as these the old man continued to mutter and grumble all the while Liese was applying the soothing liniment to his shoulder. Sophie stood by with folded hands, and said no word. But she looked hurt. "That'll do," said Schnarcher at length. "Turn my face from the light. I want to sleep. Now go." Having received this gracious dismissal, the two women left him to repose.

"I never was so astonished," whispered Sophie, as Liese bade her good-night at the garden-gate. "Never. What made you think of going into his room?"

Liese explained. "Ay, ay! So—o—o! That was it, eh? Well, you see, child, I couldn't let you know so as to keep you from coming; for he was taken bad in the night with a bout of pain, and I had to attend to him all day. And then this evening I stepped down to the Apotheke for some doctor's stuff. It's a little hard to hear him say that I can't do anything for him after all these years, but——"

“It was very cruel, Sophie, I think.”

“Well, then, that shows you can’t rightly judge, child. A better man, nor an uprighter, than the Herr Küster don’t draw breath. There! I have been in his service forty year, so I ought to know. And every pastor we have ever had in the parish has looked up to him, I can tell you that. And to hear him read out a chapter of Holy Writ,—one of them awful ones, such as the fifth of Ezekiel,—why, it’s enough to make your blood curdle in your veins, the way he does it. So, you may judge whether I don’t think him a good man. But it has been a sad piece of work, this going away of Otto. The sacristan has not been the same man since. But I’ll tell you what, —it’s my opinion that his taking to you like this is the best sign in the world.”

“But do you think he knew who I was, Sophie?”

“Do I think he knew who you were? Goodness, Lieschen, you talk like a baby! Let Simon Schnarcher alone for knowing. But, see here, if it pleases him to pretend, like, that he don’t know,—why, you humour him. Come again to-morrow if so be you can manage it, and say just nothing at all about who you are, or what your name is. The Herr Küster is an excellent man in the main,—still he is but a man; and we must always make allowance for that, my dear,

as you'll learn some day, when you have a man of your own to manage. Now, good-night, Liebchen. Keep your heart up, and don't fret. 'Twill all come right in the end." And with these cheery words in her ears, Liese returned homeward through the gloaming.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW IT STRUCK THE UPPER HALF-DOZEN.

FROM the beginning of April there had been flying through Europe continually varying, self-contradictory reports as to the probabilities in favour of war or peace. It were a curious and not uninstructive study to look back to the public journals of the time, and mark the successive shifting and vacillations of opinion about the affairs of Germany, as they were therein set forth; the solemn announcements,—on infallible authority,—that things were looking black, followed by solemn announcements,—on authority quite equally infallible,—that all was whiter than the driven snow! Public opinion in Detmold was divided and subdivided on the subject. But in the select and starry circle of the fashionable world, I believe that the excitement of the topic was hailed as a boon.

In truth, the starry circle was a very limited and,—if I dare say so,—a stupid one. Frau Mathilde von

Schleppers and Frau Amalia Wilhelmina von Groll were its acknowledged chiefs; but the rivalry between these two ladies caused considerable inconvenience to the lesser lights. Each was very imposing in her separate way, and each was impressed with a sincere conviction of her own importance. But one chief difference between the two women was this; that whereas Frau von Groll,—by nature narrow-minded and selfish, and accustomed to reign supreme over small garrison societies in virtue of her long descent,—was genuinely indifferent to the opinions and feelings of others; Frau von Schleppers, on the other hand, was always subject to a lurking suspicion that her claims to social supremacy might be disputed or denied; and she consequently laboured indefatigably to assert her dignity. She would by no means be led by her dear friend Amalia. And Frau von Groll was equally resolved on her part not to yield an inch to “the Von Schleppers’ set,” as she privately designated many of the lawyer’s old friends. Indeed, the amount of superfineness necessary to enable one to be on visiting terms with the two leaders of fashion became such as to threaten the reduction of Detmold “society” to infinitesimal proportions. The list of persons pronounced visitable grew “fine by degrees,” it is true, but also it grew “beautifully less.” And as the

population of the little Residenz was not very frequently recruited by the introduction of any foreign element among the inhabitants, matters began to look serious. Consider, then, what a welcome relief in this ever-increasing stagnation was the breath of Rumour that came ruffling the social surface into life and movement !

That it would presently grow to be a gale which should also stir the deepest depths of society was not, as yet, a recognised probability in the starry circle aforesaid.

There, the tone of feeling was, on the whole, anti-Prussian. The ladies especially exhibited a very decided sympathy with Austria ; but the causes of such sympathy differed widely in different individuals. Frau von Groll, with her usual large-minded wisdom, observed that this was what education and liberalism and patriotism led to ! Now the world would see what came of such notions being scattered broadcast. She frequently and loudly regretted that her practical remedy of hanging, or cutting off the heads of all persons who promulgated such pestiferous doctrines, had not been applied earlier. Frau von Schleppers was almost tragic in the gloominess of her forebodings. She understood that the " Provincial Gazette,"—one of Herr von Bismarck's own supporters,—appealed to

the "national enthusiasm" and "the goodwill of German patriots!" What did they think of that? As to that odious "*Kölnische Zeitung*," of course that paper rushed into the wildest extremes,—talked of "universal suffrage." Frau von Schleppers' chief sorrow in the matter was, she averred, that the influence of birth and family would be weakened. And should that lamentable result take place, Mathilde,—the Hanoverian shoemaker's daughter,—shuddered to contemplate the chaos that must ensue.

Fräulein Bopp hoped the poor dear Austrians would be victorious in the event of a conflict. Their officers were so eminently gentlemanlike and good-looking, and their white uniforms enchantingly elegant. She had visited Prague once, and had been in a chronic state of very innocent and romantic admiration for a certain blue-eyed, golden-haired subaltern, during the whole time of her stay there. Frau Oberhausen, the stout placid matron, shook her head over her knitting, and opined that it was a pity folks couldn't live comfortably together without quarreling and fighting; especially Austrians and Prussians, who, after all, were both Germans;—brothers in blood and in language. But these poor-spirited and pacific remarks were but coldly received.

The leonine Professor tossed his mane wildly, and

almost snorted as he discussed the state of affairs. What were his precise views on the question of the Duchies, or on that of Federal reform, it was difficult to discover. But one salient trait of his character was brought out in strong relief. The Professor was the victim of a very virulent Anglophobia; and he launched into withering denunciations of the policy and people of Great Britain, in a way which, if not "germane to the matter" in hand, was at least pleasantly exciting. In one way or another it was all England's fault. The English were base, mean, greedy, drunken, stupid, illiterate. They were Philistines to a man; and what a dreadful thing that was!

Frau von Schleppers' house was the scene of many warm discussions about the ever-shifting phantasmagoric spectacle of German politics, as displayed in the public journals. People took the habit of dropping into Frau Mathilde's drawing-room in an informal way that could only have been justified by the excitement of the times, and the necessity which every one felt himself under of "talking things over." The great topic had swallowed up the lesser. The fact of the Von Grolls' inheritance, and the prospect of their leaving Detmold, had already become bygone, unimportant matters. Under ordinary circumstances, they would have served as subjects of eager talk for months.

Under cover of the general excitement little innovations crept in; breaches in the hitherto inviolate etiquette which had hedged the genteel from profane outsiders. People who were themselves barely "some-bodies," introduced into Frau von Schleppers' salon other people who were,—in any social sense,—actually and positively "nobodies."

Mathilde kept high state in a big worsted-work covered chair. Her pleasant sunny sitting-room, looking on to the river, became the rendezvous of all the "select" society, and of those who aspired to belong to it. She held a species of court there every evening,—a court, it must be admitted, less after the Louis Quatorze pattern than that of a citizen king receiving brave national guards, and the roturier element generally, at the Tuileries. For, as has been hinted, the general excitement and feverish thirst for news caused some relaxation in the strict exclusiveness of Detmold society. The Justizrath hovered about the room, gliding noiselessly from group to group of talkers, disappearing sometimes into his own den.

"Great press of business! Poor Herr Justizrath; he has everything now on his shoulders! Wonderful man; sees to all minutest details!" Such were the flattering murmurs that floated round the worsted-work chair whenever the Justizrath left the room; and

Mathilde would raise her eyes to heaven with a look compounded of real complacency and affected despair. The poor woman was immensely gratified by the general homage she received, and looked forward to the time when, as the lady of the Land-steward von Schleppers, she should sit secure upon a throne unshared by any rival. Meanwhile she assiduously kept up her intimacy with the noble Dame von Groll, and had, in truth, been of considerable use to that aristocratic personage by the performance of sundry little acts of womanly friendship.

Frau von Groll's bereavement was yet so recent as to render it impossible for her to receive many visitors. Besides,—on such small hinges does even the fashionable world turn!—the dressmaker had not yet completed the black silk gown in which Amalia Wilhelmina geboren Dornberg intended publicly to honour the memory of the dear departed. One stuffy bombazine was as yet the sole mourning garment which that perfidious mantua-maker had sent home. Now an ordinary mortal might be mourned in bombazine; not so a hochwohlgeborner Friherr von Dornberg;—especially by a sister who was his heir-at-law! Thus, for the time, Amalia remained in comparative retirement, and Mathilde reigned and ruled without control.

One evening, when the assembled company at the Von Schleppers' was in high debate, and the leonine Professor was declaring aloud that to all persons who were not Philistines,—and who, not being Philistines, were therefore able to take a calm, impartial, comprehensive view of things,—it was obvious that the brutal islanders were entirely unable to comprehend the utterances of their one great poet, and were indebted entirely to German commentators for the elucidation of what Shakspeare really meant, the maid who had replaced little Lieschen entered the room and gave a note into her master's hand. The Justizrath read it, put it in his pocket, and shuffled quietly out of the room. "Ach Gott!" exclaimed Fräulein Bopp, letting her work fall, and clasping her hands; "what has become of that poetical-looking little creature who used to be here, Frau von Schleppers? Such a face!" she continued, turning to the Professor, for whom poor Fräulein Bopp had conceived a feeble kind of romantic admiration. "You, Herr Professor, who have such an eye for the Beautiful, would have been enchanted with her, I am sure."

The Professor tossed his mane, and tried, as well as he could, to look as though he had an eye for the Beautiful. "A relative of yours, madam?" he asked Mathilde.

"My maid, Professor. A pretty little creature. She was like a picture. She has gone away. I was obliged to get rid of her. A person to whom the Justizrath strongly objected, besieged our house to make love to her. But," added Mathilde, coming down from her lofty heights with a sudden impulse of womanly kind-heartedness, "she was a right good, modest, true little maiden, and had such a hand for pastry! Well, I cried when she went away, that's the truth."

So Liese had been discussed; her pretty face, soft eyes, white skin, shining chestnut hair, and little hand, like a lady's hand, only roughened somewhat by labour. Fräulein Bopp was enthusiastic in her praise. The Professor listened with interest, and the poor Fräulein was delighted; until at last her feminine instinct told her that the tawny-maned creature was really and truly attending to what she said, and by no means to her who was saying it. A mortifying discovery, which yet failed to draw from the good Fräulein any more bitter word than the remark that Lieschen, "though charmingly pretty now, had a tendency to grow chubby, which might, in time, mar her beauty." Fräulein Bopp displayed not the least tendency to grow chubby.

"What a pity to send the girl away!" exclaimed Frau Oberhausen.

“But, my dear lady, I have explained to you——,” began Mathilde majestically.

“Well, but after all, I don’t see any such crime in having a sweetheart!” Here Fräulein Bopp, who was always on the side of sentiment, gave a little nod of approbation. “You know,” proceeded Frau Oberhausen, knitting away with placid face, “you and I both had sweethearts ourselves once upon a time, Frau von Schleppers;—hadn’t we now?”

The Fräulein, to whose mind the vision of Mathilde von Schleppers and the Justizrath as a pair of lovers was a quite new and startling conception, felt that this was going almost too far. She looked at her hostess, expecting to see she knew not what expression of disdain and majesty. But, instead of that, Mathilde’s face softened, her mouth smiled, and her eyes grew almost tender, as she answered, “Ah, dear me; yes, to be sure we had, Frau Oberhausen! ‘Ach es war wohl schöne zeit!’ as the song says. It was a pleasant time that! As for me, I shouldn’t perhaps have sent her away on that account only; but the Justizrath said——.” Mathilde stopped short suddenly. Her husband’s prohibition against gossiping about their household affairs rose in her mind; and Mathilde never willingly disregarded any prohibition of her husband’s. She went on after a second’s pause, “The

fact is her relations wanted her at home again. The farmer's wife came here and spoke to me, and I permitted the child to return to Horn."

"To Horn?" said Fräulein Bopp. "She lives in Horn, then?"

"Yes, in a farm-house,—one of those queer old barn-dwellings that one scarcely ever sees out of Detmold. I remember thinking them so odd when I first came here," said Frau von Schleppers. She was always careful to impress on her acquaintances that, though in Detmold, she was not of it, but could boast of a much wider experience of the world than theirs.

"How romantic they are!" cried the spinster, glancing at the Professor.

"Very uncomfortable, I should say," observed Frau Oberhausen mildly.

"They have a picturesque character all their own," said the Professor. "When I was a young fellow,—a student,—I made a walking tour in this district. I was always,—ahem!—rather devoted to science." Fräulein Bopp murmured an inaudible corroboration, and smiled ecstatically. "And there is much that is interesting to a geologist in the country beyond Horn; the Externsteine are especially so. I saw a great many of those barn-dwellings at that time I speak of. They are certainly picturesque."

“My husband says that the Lehmanns’ farm is considered one of the best specimens,” said Frau von Schleppers.

“How charming it would be to go and see it!” suggested Fräulein Bopp, clasping her hands, and looking imploringly at Frau von Schleppers.

“Well,” answered the latter, “the farmer’s wife did give me a humble invitation, poor soul! and I should like to see Lieschen; and if the Justizrath had no objection——”

“Pray, if you go, let me be of the party,” said the Professor, gently shaking his locks over his brow. “It would quite bring back my youthful reminiscences, —mes souvenirs de jeunesse.” So it was settled that early in the following week Frau von Schleppers, Fräulein Bopp, and the Professor, should drive over to Horn, and spend the day at Lehmann’s farm. Frau Oberhausen excused herself from being of the party. She had her Max and the children to look after, she said. Besides, she knew quite well what the Lippe-Detmold farms were like, and she did not care to see any more of them. Fräulein Bopp, however, who had a stock of romance and enthusiasm enough to set up a girls’ school, was enchanted with the project. She left Frau von Schleppers’ house in a dream of delight, escorted gallantly by the Professor, and followed,—for

the proprieties must, above all things, be observed,—at three paces, by the ancient serving-maid, who had known her all her life, and to whom she was still,—poor, withered, faded Fräulein,—“my young lady.”

CHAPTER XXV.

“WHO WANTS EGGS MUST BEAR THE HEN’S CACKLING.”

THE Justizrath, on leaving his wife’s drawing-room, went softly out at the street door, and betook himself to the Von Grolls’ house, opposite the gardens of the Schloss. He was admitted at once, and shown into the many-hued salon, within whose eminently genteel precincts my reader has already been introduced. Frau von Groll was there alone, seated on a broad sofa at the lower end of the room. There was no light save the feeble glimmer of one tallow candle propped up in a tall spindle-shanked silver candlestick. On a little round table in front of the lady were set forth bread and butter, cold sausage, and a great jug of beer. The fair Amalia was taking her solitary supper.

“Ei, Herr Justizrath!” she exclaimed, “I dare say you wondered what made me send for you at this hour; but I wanted to say a word to you in private, and I thought this would be my best chance. If I had gone

to your house, or if you had come here in the day-time, ten to one your wife would have popped in upon us. She haunts me now at all hours, poor woman!" The Justizrath stood bowing and rubbing his hands deferentially ; casting all the while, however, a sidelong look on the Major's wife that was by no means friendly in its expression.

Von Schleppers would have told you that it was quite in accordance with his theories and observation that the "gnädige Frau" should be ungrateful for the attentions of her dear friend Mathilde, and should speak of her in a tone of impertinent patronage ; but, nevertheless, such behaviour was not one whit more agreeable to him in practice than it would have been to the most confiding and unsophisticated of men. Von Schleppers was fond of his wife, after his fashion, and in his heart thought her a woman in every way superior to the wizened, selfish, arrogant little specimen of humanity before him. Still he stood bowing, and still he rubbed his hands deferentially, and awaited with some curiosity what Frau von Groll should deign to say next.

"Sit down, Justizrath," said she. "I can't talk comfortably while you are standing there. So ! Now I hope you will understand that what I am going to say to you is to be quite private and between ourselves.

I wish you'd just see that that door is tight shut ;—that maid of mine might be listening."

The Justizrath obeyed. When he resumed his chair he grinned and half closed his eyes. "I always talk very softly ; it is a useful habit to require," said he with a touch of sarcasm directed against Frau von Groll's peacock voice.

The lady was impervious to the sarcasm, but she understood the hint, and modulated her screaming tones into a somewhat lower key. "Well now, first of all, Justizrath," she proceeded, "have you heard from the Major?"

The Justizrath suspected a trap. There was no special reason why he should have done so ; but all questions presented themselves to his mind in the light of springs to catch information which it might be well for him not to part with. He answered the lady's demand by echoing her words. "Heard from the Major, meine theure Dame? I trust there is nothing amiss ;—nothing to alarm you. You surely have heard from him?"

"O, yes, I have heard from him ; but as to alarm, I'm not in the least alarmed ;—of course not ; but I'm a good deal vexed, and with reason ; and you will say so too, Justizrath, when I tell you all. It is a thousand pities that I did not go to Bohemia with my husband ;

"My maid, Professor. A pretty little creature. She was like a picture. She has gone away. I was obliged to get rid of her. A person to whom the Justizrath strongly objected, besieged our house to make love to her. But," added Mathilde, coming down from her lofty heights with a sudden impulse of womanly kind-heartedness, "she was a right good, modest, true little maiden, and had such a hand for pastry! Well, I cried when she went away, that's the truth."

So Liese had been discussed; her pretty face, soft eyes, white skin, shining chestnut hair, and little hand, like a lady's hand, only roughened somewhat by labour. Fräulein Bopp was enthusiastic in her praise. The Professor listened with interest, and the poor Fräulein was delighted; until at last her feminine instinct told her that the tawny-maned creature was really and truly attending to what she said, and by no means to her who was saying it. A mortifying discovery, which yet failed to draw from the good Fräulein any more bitter word than the remark that Lieschen, "though charmingly pretty now, had a tendency to grow chubby, which might, in time, mar her beauty." Fräulein Bopp displayed not the least tendency to grow chubby.

"What a pity to send the girl away!" exclaimed Frau Oberhausen.

“But, my dear lady, I have explained to you——,” began Mathilde majestically.

“Well, but after all, I don’t see any such crime in having a sweetheart!” Here Fräulein Bopp, who was always on the side of sentiment, gave a little nod of approbation. “You know,” proceeded Frau Oberhausen, knitting away with placid face, “you and I both had sweethearts ourselves once upon a time, Frau von Schleppers;—hadn’t we now?”

The Fräulein, to whose mind the vision of Mathilde von Schleppers and the Justizrath as a pair of lovers was a quite new and startling conception, felt that this was going almost too far. She looked at her hostess, expecting to see she knew not what expression of disdain and majesty. But, instead of that, Mathilde’s face softened, her mouth smiled, and her eyes grew almost tender, as she answered, “Ah, dear me; yes, to be sure we had, Frau Oberhausen! ‘Ach es war wohl schöne zeit!’ as the song says. It was a pleasant time that! As for me, I shouldn’t perhaps have sent her away on that account only; but the Justizrath said——.” Mathilde stopped short suddenly. Her husband’s prohibition against gossiping about their household affairs rose in her mind; and Mathilde never willingly disregarded any prohibition of her husband’s. She went on after a second’s pause, “The

not concern ourselves. But presently the Justizrath came to the following paragraph, which he read aloud ; —“‘ You will be surprised, Amalia, to learn that your brother had changed his religion, and died in the Catholic faith.’” The Justizrath at this raised his eyes, and looked at Frau von Groll. Then he went on with the letter. “‘ His wife, the late Baroness Dornberg, was, it seems, a very devout Catholic.’”

“ She was a most absurd and outrageous bigot ! ” interrupted Frau von Groll charitably. “ And as to my brother Ernest,—why he cared for no religion whatsoever, that ever I heard of, all his life long ; so it wasn’t very likely that he should die a Catholic. Was it, now ? ”

“ Umph ! ” muttered the Justizrath. “ I am not prepared to be quite sure of that.”

“ Stuff and nonsense, Justizrath ! I am sure. Wait a little, and read on, and then you will understand the meaning of Ernest’s wonderful conversion.”

The Justizrath proceeded with the letter. “‘ The late Baroness’s chaplain, a very mild, reverend old man——’ ”

“ Designing old Jesuit ! ” ejaculated Amalia, parenthetically.

“‘ Informed me yesterday, that Baron Dornberg had professed himself a Catholic on his death bed, and had

received the sacraments of the Romish Church. It seems that after his wife's death, he allowed the chaplain to remain in the castle, and to perform mass for the household servants and so on. But Ernest himself,—although the priest acknowledged he had earnestly and often attempted to convert him,—had never up to the very last appeared to care about religious matters at all.””

“Of course he didn't. I told you so. They got hold of him when he didn't know what he was doing, and made him say anything. It's shameful!”

Amalia all this time was devouring her supper with greedy eagerness. The Justizrath read on in a slow, monotonous, unmoved tone of voice, every now and then adjusting his tortoiseshell eyeglasses more firmly on his nose. “‘As I mistrusted my own power of remembering exactly what the old priest said, I requested him to be good enough to write down a statement of what he had told me. A copy of this statement I enclose to you. I send it because it will be a week or so yet before I can be in Detmold; and, as your brother's heir-at-law, I think it right that you should be put in possession of the facts at once.’”

“Very methodical, indeed, on the part of the Major,” said Von Schleppers, glancing at the neatly written paper inclosed in the letter. “It must be very gratify-

ing to you, gnädige Frau, to be so thoroughly in your husband's confidence."

"Oh, as to that," replied Frau von Groll sharply, "Ferdinand tells me everything, because he always relies on my advice."

"Ach, so!"

"Yes; he hates the trouble of thinking for himself. And I can always make him follow my lead, except when he gets on his high horse of chivalry and honour, and I don't know what all. Then he's as obstinate as possible. Really, to hear Ferdinand you might suppose that we, nobly born, were worse off than the common folks; for according to him, we are hampered with all kinds of scruples, and duties, and responsibilities! For my part, I don't see what's the good of being noble at all, unless you can have privileges beyond those of the mob!"

"Very natural! Do you wish me to peruse the Major's report?"

"Of course; that is the cream of the matter."

The Justizrath read aloud as follows;—

"'STATEMENT OF THE REVEREND NEPOMUK SOUKA.

"'As soon as it became evident to himself that the Baron Ernest Dornberg's illness must end fatally, he exhibited a strong desire to speak with me privately. I was at hand, of course,——'"

“Not a doubt of it, old crocodile!” This from the lady, who closed her sentence with a snapping bite at a great slice of sausage.

“—At hand, of course,” repeated the Justizrath calmly, “and prepared to do my duty. The doctor at first objected to Baron Dornberg’s making any attempt to talk, but the Baron was not accustomed to have his will opposed, and displayed so much excitement that it was judged best to let him have his way. On being left alone with me, he signed to me to put my ear close to his lips. I did so, and he informed me in a feeble voice that he knew he was dying, and that he desired to save his soul, and to profess his belief in the Catholic faith. He then directed me to open a drawer in his writing-desk, and to take out of it the sum of two thousand gulden, in Austrian paper money, and a further sum of five hundred francs in French gold. I obeyed. He stated that it was his dying request that this money should be left in my hands——”

Here the Justizrath paused for an instant, and Frau von Groll nodded triumphantly, and cried out, “Aha! Do you begin to see now? But go on; only go on!”

“To be applied after his death in masses for the repose of his soul and that of his wife. I entreated him to allow some witness to be present, and to this,

after some demur, he agreed. I called in the Haushofmeister, and one of his subordinates,—both faithful old servants of the late Baroness,—and in their presence recapitulated the terms of the gift; the Baron confirming me at intervals by a faint word or sign. When I came to the words, “and also for the repose of the soul of Henriette Franziska, late Baroness Dornberg,” he shook his head impatiently, and stopped me with a gesture of his hand. “I thought, my son,” said I, that you desired the name of your wife to be included.” He made an affirmative gesture. “Then am I not right? Was she not named Henriette Franziska?” He gasped out, “No, no, no; not that!” several times, and pointed to his watch chain, attached to which there hung a small key. I did not know to what casket or drawer the key might belong, but the Haushofmeister said, “That little key opens the small drawer in the Herr Baron’s ebony cabinet.” And to this the dying man gave instant confirmation. He looked eagerly towards the door of his study, in which the cabinet stood, and became violently excited. “Is it your desire,” I asked, “that the drawer in the ebony cabinet be opened?” He made a great effort to speak, raised himself on his pillow, and said hoarsely, “Yes;—my wife.” Then he fell back exhausted and nearly insensible.

"The physician on being summoned positively forbade any one to speak to the Baron for some hours. He applied such restoratives as were needed, and insisted on perfect quiet above all things. I informed the doctor that Baron Dornberg had professed himself a Catholic, and stated that so soon as he recovered consciousness, it would be my duty to shrive him and to administer the last rites of the Church. The Baron remained in a lethargy during the whole of the night. In the grey of morning he opened his eyes and appeared sensible, but he was so entirely prostrated by weakness as to be unable to lift a finger. His voice, too, was reduced to a whisper. The doctor told me he could do no more, and that the end was rapidly approaching. I ordered the room to be cleared, and set about my sacred duties. As to what passed at that final interview, of course my lips are sealed. As soon as Baron Dornberg had ceased to breathe, the keys of his study and bed-chamber and of the strong box containing deeds, were delivered up to his lawyer, whom he had sent for from Prague, but who did not arrive until just before he expired, and while I was still engaged in prayer at his bedside. Major von Groll is aware that everything remained under the charge of this legal gentleman until he, the Major, arrived at the castle. I have nothing more to add."

“There is only one mercy in the matter,” said Frau von Groll, when the Justizrath had finished reading, “and that is, that Ernest’s last illness took him off so suddenly, before the lawyer could arrive. If he had come sooner, Ernest would have been cajoled by that sly old priest into making a will, and then, of course, good-bye to my inheritance. He would have left everything to found some chapel, or convent, or something. The greater the sinner, the greater the saint; and as Ernest was certainly not a model of virtue all his life, I suppose he got frightened, and thought to wipe out all scores at the last. And it would have been very selfish and shocking conduct, I think, to try to save his soul at the expense of the last surviving member of his family.”

“I thought,” observed the Justizrath slyly, “that the gnädige Frau did not believe in the reality of her brother’s death-bed conversion.”

“Oh,—well,—I’m sure I don’t know. Believe or disbelieve, it doesn’t much matter; for it can’t be helped now, at all events. But one thing is clear,—Ferdinand ought never to have allowed the priest to keep that money! Ernest may have died a Catholic, or he may not; but as to the gift of the money,—that I don’t believe a word of, and that I would never sanction. It is such a disgraceful attempt, you know. So

very shocking, isn't it? You don't say anything, Justizrath. Why don't you express your opinion?”

“Ha, meine theure gnädige Frau, you see there has hardly been time for me to form any opinion as yet.”

“But I tell you I am quite sure it is all a swindle.”

“Yes, yes;—you ladies are so wonderfully quick,—so extraordinarily rapid in forming your conclusions! But you must allow me, who am slow by nature, and cautious by profession,—ha! ha! by profession!—to take a little more time to form my judgment of the case. Have we got to the end of the Major's letter?”

“No; not quite. But that's no matter,” rejoined the lady impatiently. “You will see he says that in the drawer in the ebony cabinet he found a portrait of a woman,—some hussy, I'll warrant,—and Ferdinand attaches so much importance to the Reverend Nepomuk Souka's statement, that he has been bothering his brain to conjecture who this woman could have been. Here,” she added, snatching her husband's letter from the Justizrath's hand, and hurriedly casting her eyes over it until she came to the required paragraph, “he says,—hum—m—m—ah, there it is! He says, 'I mentioned having discovered this portrait, in a letter to Von Schleppers some time ago, but I had not then spoken with the chaplain, and did not attach to the discovery all the importance I am inclined to give it, since hear-

ing what Father Souka has to say.' Now, of course, that's all nonsense. What importance can it have? I ask you, Justizrath, what importance can it have?" Frau von Groll fixed her eyes on the Justizrath's face with a very singular expression.

"Ha! Umph! Well, you see, my dear lady, that might depend,—that might depend on circumstances."

Frau von Groll folded up her husband's letter, and put it in the black satin reticule again. "Now, look here, Justizrath," she said, with the peculiar tone and manner which we are accustomed to associate with arms stuck akimbo, and a copious flow of very idiomatic vernacular;—for although Amalia Wilhelmina von Groll was a high-born lady, she was apt, when she grew angry, to betray an unaccountable resemblance to very low-born ladies, indeed. "Look here! It's no use beating about the bush with me, you know. I have shown you the Major's letter, because it was my interest to show it you; and because I know it's your interest to back me up. You want to step into Ferdinand's shoes as land-steward the very moment we have made up our minds to be off to the Dornberg estates, in Saxony."

"My dear madam——"

"Just you listen, Justizrath. Now, as to that I have no particular objection. We can't keep the land-

stewardship here and reside on the Saxon property too; and I would much rather have done with all this business of rents and accounts and clerks, and all that, which a gentleman like Ferdinand isn't fit to cope with. It would suit you very well. Oh! you needn't be offended. I know you have gentle blood in your veins. But you ain't a Von Groll, nor yet a Dornberg, and, moreover, you are accustomed to earn your living. And as it is, you have all the real power of the land-stewardship in your hands. Of course I know that perfectly. Well and good, then. We are willing to go, and you are glad to get rid of us. But, mark you, if any kind of nonsense about my right of succession to my brother's property gets put into Ferdinand's head, he'll never rest until he makes out that I can't lay claim to a penny. That's Ferdinand all over. I know him better than you do, and I tell you he'd be capable of carrying out his ridiculous high-flown notions even though he beggared himself,—and me, even me!—by them. So I would just advise you to set Major von Groll's mind right on this subject when he comes to consult you,—as he is sure to do;—and to persuade him to let well alone, and keep quiet. If we could get the money back that the chaplain had, I should be very glad, of course. But if there is no chance of that being recovered quietly, why, I suppose

we must submit. Anything would be better than—than—making a scandal over the very coffin of my poor dead brother. For he was my brother, of course, although he never behaved like one to me. You see I'm quite open and straightforward with you, Justizrath, for I think it best to be so. You naturally look to your own interests, and I naturally look to mine. But if we can make our interests the same, why, it will be better for all parties. So now I hope we thoroughly understand one another!"

Frau von Groll had uttered this long harangue with the utmost volubility, scarcely pausing for breath. Her face was rigid; every muscle and sinew in her meagre throat stood out like whip-cord; and her little, sharp eyes sparkled viciously. Altogether, the aristocratic Amalia was not a pleasing spectacle to contemplate. Nevertheless, the Justizrath did contemplate her. He threw himself back in his chair, and stared at her like one in a trance. But though outwardly calm and motionless, he was inwardly boiling with indignation, and the kind of surprised vexation that a practised fencer might feel who should have his dexterously-wielded weapon knocked out of his hand by some clumsy boor with a cudgel.

"I am not sure, madam," he said, answering the lady's last words in his quietest voice, "that I do

thoroughly understand you. But,” he added hastily, seeing that she was about to interrupt him, and holding up his hand as though to ward off the impending torrent of words, “we need not recapitulate. I trust it is not necessary for me to assure you that whenever Major von Groll does me the honour to ask my advice, I shall give it quite impartially, to the best of my professional knowledge and ability. And it appears to me, if I have rightly apprehended what you have told me, so far,—though, I own, I require a little more time to come at a clear idea of the case, being, as I have said, slow by nature,—it appears to me that you are disturbing yourself quite unnecessarily. Because your late brother professed himself a Catholic on his death-bed, and gave a sum of money in trust to his confessor, that could scarcely, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be twisted into a pretext for depriving you of your legal inheritance.”

With that the Justizrath rose, and bowed himself out of the room before Frau von Groll could utter another word. He felt that even his self-command would not have been proof against much more of that lady’s conversation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LIESCHEN'S LOVE-LETTER.

THE distinguished party of visitors from Detmold duly made their excursion to Lehmann's farm, and partook of some country dainties prepared by the skilful hands of Frau Hanne. Lehmann's farm was not a model one, as we English are accustomed to think of model farms. It could boast no show dairy glistening with bright pots and pans, and beautiful with coloured tiles, and fresh with flowing water. And then there were the dunghill and the filthy duck-pond before the door. But the two ladies, Frau von Schleppers and Fräulein Bopp, with their cavalier the Professor, were delighted with everything. Especially were they delighted with Lieschen's beauty, and pretty soft manners.

“Poetisch! ganz poetisch!” Fräulein Bopp exclaimed at every moment; whilst the Professor was so struck that he forgot his head of hair for ten minutes. By a decree of the inscrutable Fates, Hanne was in a civil, good-humoured mood. She was pleased to ap-

prove of the Justizrath's wife, and opened her heart to that lady on the subject of the trouble they had had about Liese and her lover. "From what I hear," pronounced Frau von Schleppers, "I should say the young man was by no means worthy of Lieschen. What has become of him?"

"I don't know, indeed," answered Hanne tartly. "I only know that his great uncle has turned him off altogether, after bearing with his whims and sauciness many years. And as to his not being worthy,—well, I can't tell, I'm sure. But the fact is, Liese ought to have a husband that would rule her right, and show her her duty. Now, Otto Hemmerich has no respect for anything on earth, or in the heavens above,—no, nor in the waters beneath, for that matter!"—bringing out the last clause as though it were a powerful climax. "Liese is gentle enough, I don't deny it, but perhaps you may have found out in the course of your life, gnädige Frau, that it's your gentle folks that always stick tightest to their own way."

"I think irreverence and want of respect for superiors are the great evils of these days," rejoined Frau von Schleppers loftily. Then she tasted some apple-compôte, and praised it, and the two women became quite friendly. But of Fräulein Bopp, Hanne could not be got to approve.

"A skinny, silly thing," she pronounced, sitting in judgment on the poor Fräulein when the visitors were gone. "Turning up her skim-milk-coloured eyes, and skipping about like a fool!"

"She is a kind lady, I think," observed Lieschen timidly. And the farmer added that he thought she was good-natured, and had taken prodigiously to their Lieschen.

"Pooh!" ejaculated Hanne. "Taken to Lieschen? That's all you know about it, Franz Lehmann. I'll tell you what;—she has taken prodigiously to that Herr Professor, or however you call him, and she praised up Lieschen just to make him think that she herself was as sweet as honey."

"Lord!" said Franz, opening wide his blue eyes. "How sharp you women are about one another!"

"Need of somebody to be sharp when there's so many dunderheads going through the world with their eyes shut," was the Hausfrau's gracious response.

"Do you think, Cousin Hanne," said Lieschen musingly, "that poor Fräulein Bopp is really fond of the Professor?"

"Fond?" echoed Hanne with a shrill upward inflection of the voice. "Fond? At her time of life, and him with a head like a mop!"

After the visitors were gone, Lieschen stole down to

the sacristan's cottage. She had been there twice or thrice since her first interview with the old man. As long as his attack of rheumatism continued, he had received her,—if not graciously,—at least with obvious satisfaction, and had accepted her tendance. As he began to grow better, and was able to sit up in his arm-chair in the kitchen, he fell back into his old harsh, sour manner. But he never forbade her to come; and sometimes when Liese,—engaged in helping old Sophie with some household labour,—would look up unexpectedly, she would find the old man's eyes fixed upon her with a curious, searching, not unkindly gaze. Once or twice, when they were alone together for a moment, the sacristan had spoken to her almost gently, for him. But in Sophie's presence he snapped and snarled at Liese as at the rest of the world, and he never called her anything but "that lass from Lehmann's."

On this evening that I am writing of, Liese ran down the lane towards Simon Schnarcher's cottage, and peeped over the hedge into the garden. Sophie was there, taking down some linen that had been drying on a line. The moment she caught sight of Liese's head above the hedge, the old woman threw down the heap of linen pell-mell on to the grass, and hobbled down the pathway as quickly as she could. Liese's heart

beat violently, and she leant against the gate-post. She saw in Sophie's face that there was news.

"Here, child, here!" cried Sophie, scarcely less excited than the girl; "look here what I have for you. It's a blessing from the Lord that you came to-night, for how my poor old bones would have carried me to the farm after the day's work I've gone through, I'm sure I don't know. And yet I couldn't have slept till you'd got it."

"It" was a letter from Otto—a square-folded letter, written on thin paper, and directed to "Sophie Wagner, in the house of the Sacristan of St. Mary's, Horn, Lippe-Detmold." Liese took it with a trembling hand. "Well," cried Sophie, impatiently, "well, why in Himmel's Namen don't you open it?"

"I—I—will," stammered Liese; "but please, I should like to—to—to read it first by myself."

"Ei, ei, mein Fräulein!" exclaimed the old woman, quite huffed. "Don't think I want to pry into your letter; not I! You might say a 'thank ye' to me for taking it in, and risking getting into trouble with the sacristan for the sake of a couple of wilful young things. And you might suppose, too, that I was anxious to hear of my boy,—I that have known him all these years, and——. But it's no matter!"

She was turning away in high dudgeon, when Liese pushed open the gate and caught her hand. "Oh, Sophie! dear, kind Sophie! don't be angry! But I feel such a strange kind of feeling, that's partly joy, and partly as if I was frightened. I can't tell why. And I have longed so for this letter. Ah, you don't know,—nobody knows,—how I have longed for it; and it seems as if I must be quite alone to read it. It is as when you're saying your prayers, you know, Sophie; you feel that you cannot bear the friendliest eye upon you. Please, please don't be angry, dear Sophie! I have no one to speak to about him but you." Then the hardly-repressed tears overflowed her eyes, and streamed down over the precious letter, which she pressed to her bosom.

Sophie was melted immediately at sight of the tears, although she was as far as ever from understanding the girl's shy sensibility. For her part, she could very well bear a friendly eye upon her when she was saying her prayers; ay, or an unfriendly one either! And she rather enjoyed standing up in full view of the congregation every Sunday, and giving out a specially loud "Amen" in her quivering old voice, with the air of one who indirectly belonged to the church by virtue of her position in the sacristan's household. "Don't cry, Lieschen," she said, "don't cry, child! You

always were a queer, quiet little thing, and I suppose you always will be. There, sit yourself down under the pear tree and read your letter in peace, and presently I'll come back again and hear the news. The sacristan can't be left for long together. He's not quite so well to-night."

It was an exquisite evening in the latter spring-tide. The grass was dried by the long day's warm sunshine, and the air was sweet and balmy. The pear tree which had been laden with blossoms, had begun to change its snow for a tender green, but there were still a few flowers left on it. It was a fine old tree, spreading its branches abroad, and shadowing the short turf that grew so fresh and thick in the sacristan's little plot of ground, half garden, half orchard. At its roots nestled a family of primroses, peeping forth from the moss, faintly yellow, like callow birdlings in their nest. Liese, as she seated herself beneath the pear tree, was careful not to crush the primroses. She made way for them tenderly, by drawing her little stuff petticoat aside, lest it should graze their delicate petals. Her heart was very full. To her, the coming of a letter from Otto was, next to the coming of Otto himself, the most wonderful and important of events.

Liese was but a child in some things. She began to debate with herself whether she should pour out her

thanksgiving prayer for this great boon before or after she had read it. "Whatever be in the letter, I am thankful to see his handwriting," she argued, "so I ought to thank God for that first; and then, when I have read it, I can give praise again." So she knelt down on the grass beside the primroses, and tried to lift up her voice in thanksgiving. But though she was filled with gratitude, she could find no word to utter but "'Our Father which art in Heaven; hallowed be thy name.' And that is praying, not thanking," said Lieschen to herself. "But perhaps praying is the best way of thanking. At all events I know that God knows." And with that she began to read her letter.

It was a very long and warm-hearted letter, as might have been expected, but it contained but little news which it is essential to my story to relate. Otto had entered the Rhine country,—was writing, in fact, from Düsseldorf, and intended to push on to Coblenz, there to enrol himself in the first regiment that would accept him. Towards the end of the letter he wrote, "You remember, dearest Lieschen, my telling you that day we parted,—how long ago it seems!—that I had passed the night before in our old house in the Detmold woods. And I told you, too, that there was a poor cousin of mine, a charcoal-burner, who, excepting your

darling little self, was about the only creature in Detmold who would be sorry to part with me——.”

“Now there Otto is mistaken,” said fond little Lieschen. “I am very sure that a great many people were sorry when he went away.” Then she read on:—“This cousin of mine, Joachim Müller by name, is the man who came with me to the Justizrath’s house that happy night when my Lieschen told me that she loved me. Does she remember? And I think poor Joachim startled her with his black face. I meant to have said a word to you in his favour the last time I saw you; but you know, Herz Liebchen, that we had so many other things to say! Well, Joachim Müller has not been very happy or fortunate in his life, as far as I can make out; and I should like you, if ever you came across him in the forest,—as might easily happen, —just to say a kind word to him. Kind words have not been plenty with him, poor fellow! And a kind word from my Lieschen is something worth having. Tell him that I thought of him. It will please him, for I believe he really likes me. I should not wonder if he comes into the neighbourhood of the farm sometimes on purpose to catch a glimpse of you, as he knows that you are my betrothed, and he was quite struck with your sweet face, mein Schatz, when he saw you that night.” Lieschen resolved that she would speak

“right friendly” to the charcoal-burner if ever she met him ; and finished reading her letter ; and kissed it many times ; and then read it all over again.

Before she had finished this second perusal, Sophie returned from the house. Then there was much talking and smiling, and a few tears. Lieschen read out to the old woman all the account of Otto’s journey afoot, and his plan of enlisting at Coblenz. She read, too, a special message which Otto had sent of love and thanks to his “*theure gute Sophie*.”

The two women would willingly have lingered for hours, fondly chatting of the dear absent one, as women love to do. But the twilight was gathering, and both had duties to attend to,—Sophie with the sacristan, and Liese at the farm. So the latter prepared to depart.

“I wish,” said old Sophie, “that the Herr Küster could but know where Otto is, and what he is doing. Ach Himmel ! to think of my poor boy turning soldier in real earnest ! But there ! Otto always did mean what he said, and ’twas right aggravating of him at times, bless his heart ! And I wish the Küster could know specially how proper and dutiful Otto writes about him, and bears no grudge, and asks after the rheumatism, and all. For in sacred deed and truth the Herr Küster said very sharp things in his wrath ;—

things that made me cold to listen to. Not but what an uprighter man don't breathe. Now, good night, Lieschen ;—the Lord bless and keep you, child ! Run away home, on your swift little feet. Ach ! mine were as swift once, though not just so little. Good night !”

Lieschen needed no urging to speed homeward. Her footsteps were lighter than ever ; for the precious letter lying in her breast seemed to send a glow of hope and happiness into her heart. As she came out of the lane by the sacristan's cottage, the moon rose and lit up the black forest skirting Lehmann's hill-side meadows. Liese paused one moment to look at the peaceful scene. Then, as she resumed her way she began softly to sing the quaint, touching evening hymn,—“Nun ruhen alle Wälder,”—“Now all the woods are sleeping,” and her sweet fresh voice rose thrillingly into the still air. Suddenly she saw in the black shadow of a linden tree, right in her path, a spot of something still more intensely black than the shadow. It moved as she stopped ; and, advancing into the moonlight, proved to be the figure of a man, a charcoal-burner, with a load of charcoal in a sack upon his shoulders. Lieschen was a country girl and accustomed to roam all that peaceful district quite alone, and without a thought of fear. She felt no dread at the sight of

the stranger, but checked her singing, and bade him a gentle “good evening, friend!” as she drew near him.

The man stood motionless, gazing at her. “She is like an angel from heaven!” he muttered, “with that light upon her face.”

“Why, I do believe——” began Liese, as she saw him more distinctly, “I do believe——Bitte!—Are you not Joachim Müller?”

The man nodded silently, with his eyes still riveted upon her face.

“Sieh'mal! I am so glad to see you! Do you know I have a message for you, Joachim, from one whom you like right well.” Then she told him of her letter, and of Otto's friendly words.

Joachim thanked her humbly and gratefully, but he seemed scarcely so delighted as Lieschen had expected. The truth was, he was giving comparatively little heed to her words, so absorbed was his attention by herself. But that any one should be minding her, instead of eagerly drinking in every syllable of a message from Otto, never entered Lieschen's head. “Good night, Joachim,” she said shyly. “I must get home.”

“Good night!—Oh, if I might ask,—if I dared only ask——” said Joachim, in an imploring tone.

“What is it?”

“Would you,—would you sing that song once more as you go homeward?”

“It is a hymn,” replied Lieschen, demurely arching her chestnut eyebrows.

“I know not what it was, but it sounded like the voice of an angel. Don’t heed me. I will not follow you, or linger near you. Just let me hear that song again as you go away from me, and I will thank you and bless you.”

“Otto’s cousin is a strange, wild kind of man,” thought Lieschen. But she complied with his request. Again she raised her young silvery voice, and sang, “Nun ruhen alle Wälder;” and the sweet, piercing notes rang through the silence, and died away by degrees, as the girl’s slight form passed farther and farther away in the shimmering moonlight and under the trembling foliage of the shadowy trees. Once she turned her head and looked back. The charcoal-burner was sitting on a grass-grown mound by the roadside, with bowed shoulders, and his face buried in his hands.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE JUSTIZRATH IS "STRAIGHTFORWARD."

WHEN Joachim Müller waked in the morning and found that Otto was gone, he had been bitterly disappointed. The brief enjoyment of companionship had made the solitude doubly desolate to him. The rustle of the dry leaves being whisked hither and thither on the floor, made his heart sink. There was something in the sound which jarred upon him and caused him to feel very forlorn. "And I had resolved to speak to him this morning about the girl!" said Joachim, sitting up on his bed and staring ruefully about him. But Otto was gone, and there was no help for it.

Gradually the impression made upon Joachim Müller by the glimpse of Lieschen's fair face grew fainter;—that is to say, he began to look upon it as more unreal. It had not been the sudden resuscitation of a dead or dormant memory. That would have been more startling,—would have roused him more peremptorily to action.

When we gaze fixedly and long at an object, and then close our eyes, the object is still there under the shut lids, shining with a light of its own in the darkness. Joachim began to fancy that the converse of this had happened to him. An image had long haunted his mental vision, waning and waxing,—now clear, now faint,—but seldom altogether absent in the long dark watches of the night, or under the mysterious arches of the forest depths and thickets. Well, one day he had opened his bodily eyes and seen the image, for a moment distinct and palpable in the outside every-day world.

How likely that he had been mistaken! How likely, in short, was anything which gave him an excuse for not going near the Justizrath von Schleppers again! The Justizrath had been kind at first, it was true; but, towards the close of the interview, he had given Joachim to understand that he suspected and mistrusted him. And then, what if it were all true? What if he could prove Liese to be no base-born peasant-girl, but the legitimate daughter of a noble race? Would she be the happier for it? Would the man who had so basely deceived and deserted her mother be likely to receive a little, simple servant-maid as his daughter, and to welcome her affectionately to his home? On the other hand, there was Barbara's

memory to be cleared from unmerited aspersions ; and besides,—and this touched Joachim the nearest, for he was but an erring, ignorant man, to whom an act of abstract duty was as nothing in comparison with the impulses of a strongly-affectionate nature,—it would be so sweet to him to know that this pure maiden, the betrothed of his only friend and kinsman, was the child of poor, beautiful, dead Barbara !

So he was tossed backward and forward by doubts and irresolution. And he burnt charcoal in the Detmold woods, and carried it to the appointed storehouse ; and all the while the hours slid past inexorably swift and pauseless in their course ; and the day which the Justizrath had fixed upon for him to return to the land-steward's office came and went, and Joachim had not kept his appointment. Since Otto's departure, the charcoal-burner had been more sad and solitary than ever. He was shunned by the others of his calling, and he took no pains to seek their fellowship. He had told Otto that he thought of leaving Detmold, and that idea had been awakened by his seeing Von Groll and Albrecht the Jäger "prying about the hunting-lodge,"—as he phrased it. Joachim had expected to be driven away from that refuge. But, as we know, fate had intervened to prevent his being disturbed for a while, by calling away the Major into Bohemia.

Joachim remained, therefore, quite unmolested ; and the superstitious terrors of the huntsmen waxed stronger and stronger, and legends about the strange sights and sounds seen and heard in the head-ranger's old house grew and multiplied, as it is the nature of such legends to do. But then one evening, as Joachim was carrying a load of charcoal in the neighbourhood of Lehmann's farm, he met Lieschen walking homeward in the bright moonlight, as we have seen. And this time there was no arguing away the reality of her startling resemblance in face and voice to the ill-fated Barbara. Joachim was overcome by a flood of memories and emotions. He could not rest, he could not sleep, he could think of nothing but the sweet, fair, moonlit face, and the angelic voice sounding so clear and faint in the distance. The next morning he resolved to go betimes to the farm, and, in spite of what the Justizrath had said, boldly to speak with Farmer Lehmann about his adopted daughter.

Von Schleppers, who seldom forgot anything, and absolutely never forgot what touched his own interests ever so slightly, had awaited the charcoal-burner's return with some anxiety. He was rather relieved than otherwise, however, when the man did not appear on the appointed day, nor on the next day, nor on the day following that. The Justizrath knew of Otto's

departure from Detmold, and this rendered him easy and secure that no steps would be taken to investigate Liese's parentage before he,—the Justizrath,—should so choose. "Our friend the patriot," argued the Justizrath,—for he had by this time taken the stigma of that epithet off the apothecary Peters, to affix it on its rightful owner,—"would undoubtedly be a troublesome customer. But the charcoal-burner is another kind of man. Besides, I have a check on him, and I frightened him the other day. Yes, I frightened him, I am quite sure."

To a strictly reasonable being, incapable of entertaining a prejudice, and swayed only by the very highest of motives, it would no doubt be a thing impossible to dislike a man whom he had never seen, and of whom he had heard no evil. But the Justizrath von Schleppers was not, unfortunately, incapable of entertaining a prejudice, neither was he habitually swayed by high and noble motives. And the truth was that he heartily disliked Otto Hemmerich, on whom he had never set eyes in his life, and who was unlikely enough to cross his path in any way.

Von Schleppers' first memorable visit to the Pied Lamb, at Horn, was not his last by many. He had heard the sacristan's nephew discussed very frequently,—always of course in the sacristan's absence,—by the

little knot of worthies who were wont to assemble in Herr Quendel's Speise-Saal. Otto was invariably mentioned by them with kindness, albeit one or two disapproved, on principle, of his setting his will against the will of his grand-uncle. But the praises bestowed on him had the not altogether unheard-of result of making Von Schleppers strongly antagonistic to the young man. One phrase constantly applied to Otto was especially distasteful to the old lawyer. "He is such a frank, fearless, outspoken young fellow!" said his friends Peters, Lehmann, and the rest. Now the Justizrath hated "frank, fearless, outspoken," people, as a cat hates cold water. It amounted to a natural antipathy.

On the whole, therefore, he was quite prepared to take the sacristan's side when the final quarrel between him and his grand-nephew arose. But yet when he heard that the young man was fairly out of Detmold, he was pleased for various reasons.

It was desirable for him to make friends in Horn and throughout the Principality. For the report of his popularity judiciously carried to the ears of the Prince, would aid Von Schleppers' prospects of promotion to the land-stewardship, when Major von Groll should have left Detmold. Had Otto remained in the country, the Justizrath might have been drawn per-

force into publicly taking an attitude of hostility either towards the sacristan's nephew, or towards the sacristan himself. Neither alternative suited him. Then, too, there was this important affair of the discovery of Liese's parentage. It was clear to Von Schleppers that up to the present time no one had a suspicion of the truth save himself. That the Lehmanns were in ignorance of the real state of the case he felt sure; although how it had come to pass that they were so, he could not tell.

In his own good time, the Justizrath intended that right should be done, and the truth revealed;—in his own good time, but not an hour sooner if he could help it. Von Schleppers was no melodramatic villain. Moreover, he was fully determined to run no unnecessary risk of losing the respectable position he had attained in Detmold. He only desired to do the best for himself in the first place; and to turn to good account the chance which had so oddly brought to his knowledge various facts, to the bearing of which facts on each other he alone possessed the clue.

The Justizrath sat quietly in the land-steward's office before his desk, and cogitated. He passed the details of the case in review one after the other, and checked them off methodically in his mind. "I hold the threads in my own hand," thought he. "And when

it suits me and the time is ripe, I shall pull them ; and there will be considerable consternation in the noble house of Von Groll ! Apart from everything else, I would take up the case if it were only to enjoy the discomfiture of that vulgar, rapacious, little harpy."—It is shocking to have to chronicle such a phrase applied to Amalia Wilhelmina Von Groll, geboren Dornberg, but these were the words in the Justizrath's mind when he thought of her.—"But for the present we will keep quiet. The patriot is safely out of Detmold ; more fool he !—but it happens luckily. Major von Groll I can manage, and the charcoal-burner seems to be cowed into silence. He is more than half crazy, I believe, and perhaps has forgotten all about the resemblance he discovered, by this time ;—or has come to fancy it one of the visions he talked about."

"Bitte, Herr Justizrath," said Christian, putting his head in at the door, "here is some one wants you."

"Who is it ?"

"Oh, the Herr Justizrath knows me," said a female voice proceeding from the outer office, and the next moment Frau Hanne Lehmann stood in the doorway.

"You, Frau Lehmann ?" said the Justizrath, rising and bowing politely.

"Yes, Herr Justizrath ; I hope you'll excuse the liberty, but I've come to Detmold along with Herr

Peters, the apothecary, in his pony chaise; and a wilfuller-minded beast I never sat behind. A taste of the whip would do him good, and if he was mine he should have it."

"What, the apothecary?"

"Ach behüte! Oh no indeed, Herr Justizrath! The apothecary is a mild-spoken obliging man enough. Not over and above wise perhaps, but that's neither here nor there. And we ought always to remember that he has no wife to look after him. No; I was speaking of his old Schimmel. The fact is, my husband is at Lemgo Market. He started off at five o'clock this morning, and took our cart. And I had no beast of our own in the stable; so I just asked Herr Peters to lend me his, and let me drive myself over. However, he came with me, and left his boy in the shop, and the Lord have mercy on the customers! But of course that's no business of mine."

"Sit down, pray, Frau Lehmann. Christian, you can go. And if any one asks for me, say I am engaged."

"Well, I shan't keep you long, Herr Justizrath. Perhaps you'll say I ought not to have come to you in the matter at all. But you see I had to act and judge for myself." Hanne was attired in her Sunday clothes. No earthly consideration would have induced her to

enter the town of Detmold in her work-a-day garb. She wore a very large Tuscan straw bonnet, with bows of yellow ribbon. Hanne's bonnets always sat in a peculiarly wild fly-away fashion. You could not call it untidy or slovenly ; but they stuck on her head at a different angle from anybody else's head-gear, and gave her a generally fierce and defiant aspect. Her gown was of black shining silk, and pinned over her square shoulders she wore a white shawl with a chocolate-coloured border. Her ruddy high-boned cheeks flamed under the Tuscan bonnet, and her grey eyes were restless and bright.

“ I hope there's nothing wrong at the farm,” said the Justizrath, in his mildest manner. “ Farmer well ? Lieschen well ? That you are well, I have the pleasure of seeing.” Von Schleppers was peculiarly pleasant and gentle, for he expected to have a rather stiff argument with the masterful housewife respecting the raising of the rent of the hill-side meadows. This had been a bone of contention between him and Franz Lehmann for some time past ; and the Justizrath conjectured that the farmer's better half had resolved on taking the negotiations into her own strong hands.

“ Farmer's well, and Lieschen's well. There's never much the matter with her ! ” returned Hanne sharply. “ She's one of your sickly-looking sort, that has

more strength in them than fifty such as me. And she clears her trencher at dinner-time as well as the best, never fear! But it seems we're never to be quit of fuss and bother on her account. Why, if my own dear child that died had behaved like Liese, I'd have skinned her alive but I'd have cured her. Not that she ever would have behaved so, poor sweet lamb! and Lord forgive me for saying such a word!"

"Ay, ay, ay! So, so! What is amiss, Frau Lehmann; what is amiss?"

"Look here, Herr Justizrath; I'll tell you plain and straightforward how things are. And maybe you will be able to find some remedy in the law. For as to having our homestead prowled over at all hours by rogues and vagabonds, I won't stand it, so that's flat." The Justizrath pulled his watch from his pocket, and stared at it absently. "This morning, a few minutes after five," said Hanne, taking the hint and plunging into the middle of her subject without more ado, "my man set off for Lemgo. It's market day there. Franz sometimes sends old Claus, our waggoner; but this morning, as luck would have it, he went himself, and he won't be back, mayhap, until to-morrow evening; for he did talk of going on to the Senner-Wald to look after a colt. We were rather busy; and after I had seen Franz off, I went to the paddock behind the

orchard, to look at the lines my maids were putting up for drying linen. The paddock, Herr Justizrath, runs up right among the hill-side meadows, as you know very well."

The Justizrath nodded. "I knew we should come to the hill-side meadows," thought he. But Hanne went on,—

"And so there's a good bit of wood at one side of it where the forest comes down. Well, what should I see but mein Fräulein Lieschen trailing a good coil of new rope all among the wet grass, and talking away to somebody who was standing under a tree by the hedge. I screeched out at her, and made her jump round pretty briskly, I can tell you, and she came running down the paddock all in a flutter. 'Who's that you were talking with, instead of minding your business?' says I. 'A pretty example to Lotte and Marthe!' 'Oh, Cousin Hanne,' she says, 'it's some one who wants to speak with the master.' 'I'm master when my man's away, and mistress too,' says I; 'and if he has any business with either of us, let him come forward, and not skulk under the hedge there to talk to a child like you.' For on my conscience I thought it was that fellow, Otto Hemmerich. Liese came right up to me and whispered, 'He is quite a decent honest man, Cousin Hanne, and a kinsman of the late head

ranger's wife.' Then she beckoned, and called 'Joachim!' and out comes a great, black, hulking creature, right from the thickest of the underwood, and walks up to me and says, 'I want to speak to Farmer Lehmann; are you his wife?' I am not timid or faint-hearted in a general way, but I declare to you, Herr Justizrath, the look of the man frightened me. He was like a lunatic more than anything else. And there stood Liese as calm as possible. Oh, no one knows the depth of that girl!"

Von Schleppers was very much taken aback, and rapidly revolved various possibilities in his mind. "What did you say to the man, Frau Lehmann?" he asked.

"The first thing I said was to order him out of the paddock; for my lasses were bringing out the linen to dry, and I leave you to guess what a pickle my nice white sheets would have been in if he had happened to touch them with his filthy clothes. For you must know he was a charcoal-burner, and as black as the devil. Then I told him to go round by the lane to the farm-yard and stand there till I came to him."

"Did he obey quietly?"

"Oh, yes! He seemed mazed like. To my thinking, the creature is not quite right in his head. You may depend I gave Fräulein Lieschen a bit of my mind. I sent her up to her own room with a basketful of

stockings to darn, and bade her stay there till I sent for her."

"Did she know what was the man's business with Lehmann?"

"No; leastway she said not."

"And did the charcoal-burner tell you, after all?"

"First and foremost, he said he must speak with Franz Lehmann, and no other. Well, I'll own to you, Herr Justizrath, that that put me out a bit."

"Highly natural!"

"Well, I don't know about other folks' natures, I'm sure. But I know that it don't suit me to have strange vagabonds coming and talking about 'speaking to the master, and no other; just as if there ought to be secrets between man and wife!'"

"You will, of course, tell your husband of this man's visit?"

"I shall of course do nothing of the kind."

"Oh!"

"No. Begging your pardon, Herr Justizrath, I don't think I shall tell my man. The truth is, this charcoal-burning creature is mixed up somehow with young Hemmerich, and I believe he brought some message to Liese from Otto. You know all the trouble we've had about that matter, Herr Justizrath."

"Yes; truly!" said the lawyer in a sympathizing tone.

"I don't deny that I gave the fellow a sharp rating. He stared at me like an idiot, without speaking, for a long time. At last he said, 'But I mean no harm to you or yours; and may be I can do great good.' 'May be,' said I, 'you'll take yourself off these premises. I understand that you're a friend, or a relation, or something or other, of the sacristan's nephew. And I wish you to know that we want none of his kith and kin about the place, fetching and carrying, and making that lass of ours more obstinate and disobedient than she would be naturally. You may be quite sure that Franz Lehmann is at one with me on that matter. And I tell you, moreover, that if you come prowling about here too often, you'll run as great a risk of a cudgelling as ever you did in your life. For my man is hot tempered when he's put out, for as mild as he looks!' With that I turned on my heel and left him standing all dazed by the duck-pond. But before I went into the house, I called out as loud as I could, 'Marthe! go into the hen-house and count the chickens. We don't know what kind of folks are about; and when the child's drowned, 'tis small comfort to cover the well!'"

"Bravo, Frau Lehmann! You showed great spirit, and acted very rightly."

"O, for that matter," returned the housewife, "I

can manage my own business and always could." Hanne's temper was never to be reckoned on, and a civil speech was quite as likely as an uncivil one to draw from her a tart answer.

"Then what, may I ask, meine gute Frau, was your object in coming to me?" There was not the smallest trace of irritation in the Justizrath's tone. His eyes were as mild and as dreamy as ever, and he spoke with a quite childlike simplicity of manner.

"O well, I came to ask if you couldn't find some way of getting rid of this black-faced vagabond."

"Getting rid of him?"

"Ei, jawohl, Herr Justizrath! You helped to get rid of Otto Hemmerich, if all tales be true; and a good day's work it was."

"Now, my excellent Frau Lehmann, I beg you, as a personal favour to myself, not to believe a word of it. All tales are not true, as you know very well; and I should be sorry to be accused of having driven so,—so,—fine a young man out of his home."

"Humph! Well, I should like to have your advice, Herr Justizrath, before I see Franz again. You behaved very kind and straightforward to us before, in letting us know of Otto's coming to your house after Lieschen. And if,—if you could help us to keep the girl out of mischief, and to keep vagabonds away from

the farm, why we should not be unthankful. As to the rent of the hill-side meadows, we might come to some understanding if once Franz and me were easy in our minds—don't you see?"

The Justizrath smiled, and answered, "I am sure his gracious Highness, or his gracious Highness's land-steward, would be much gratified to have the matter amicably settled. As for me, I am only a servant of his gracious Highness. But on quite other grounds I should be happy to serve you and Farmer Lehmann,—and Lieschen, who is really a well-disposed little girl when she is in good hands."

"Wants a tight hand, anyway, I can tell you."

"All young things want that.—Ay, ay, ay! Now it seems to me, meine gute Frau Lehmann," went on the Justrizath, gently stroking the back of his right hand with the fingers of his left, "it does seem to me that you do not love Herr Otto Hemmerich very dearly."

"He has been very ungrateful and bad-behaved to me."

"That's shocking,—very shocking. And it seems to me, again, that your chief grudge against this charcoal-burner is that he is Otto's friend and kinsman——"

"And go-between. I'm certain he brought a message to Lieschen."

"Not impossible; and you would be glad,—in the interests of the young girl under your charge,—to find some means of preventing this Joachim from holding any communication with her, either on his own behalf or on Otto's?"

"That's what I would."

"So. Yes, yes;—quite so, quite so!" Upon this the Justizrath fell into a kind of reverie, after his manner. Hanne's fidgety impatience might have irritated most persons, and ruffled them from their musing; but Lawyer von Schleppers pursued his meditations as long as it seemed good to him, quite unmindful of the rustling of Frau Lehmann's stiff silk gown, the scraping and tapping of her feet on the well-waxed boards of the office floor, or the extraordinarily irritating noises she made in her throat, as though a stream of words was gurgling up there, and was only kept back by main force. At length the Justizrath spoke,—spoke with much deliberation and as though he desired to impress his words on his hearer's memory. "I believe this Joachim, the charcoal-burner, to be the same man who came into my office some time back, and,—in a very wild and incoherent manner,—asked me a great many questions about Lieschen——"

"Like his impudence!"

"——Said that she wonderfully resembled some

one whom he had known years ago, and desired me to give him what information I could respecting her parentage."

"Siehe da!"

"I told him plainly, when he spoke of going to Farmer Lehmann on the subject, that the farmer was very averse to speaking of his adopted daughter's parents, and that he had even been cross with myself for venturing some very innocent question about them."

"Why, Herr Justizrath, I tell you Franz quarrelled with me on that score! The truth is, there's no good to be said of Liese's mother,—if old stories are true,—and Franz won't say any harm."

"Well, now, it is for you to judge whether or not you will communicate this matter to your husband. I only wish to act straightforwardly. I only desire not to be misunderstood or misrepresented. Whatever may come of it, you can bear witness that I spoke quite frankly. After Herr Lehmann's somewhat unbecoming heat of manner towards me when I spoke to him of Liese's birth and parentage, it can hardly be expected that I should renew the subject with him,—unless I were called to do so professionally, you understand."

"Why, that ain't likely to happen anyway," said Hanne, looking a good deal puzzled.

“In conclusion, I deem it my duty to inform you that,—although there is nothing to be said against this charcoal-burner, since he has been employed in the Prince’s woods,—I know him to have been an inmate of the Strafarbeitshaus,—the great prison,—of Munich, many years ago.”

“Herr in Himmel!” cried Frau Lehmann, jumping to her feet, “and my ducklings! And the sheets hanging out all day in the paddock! And the apple store-room not locked! A pretty set of creatures Lieschen brings about the place truly! A thief—and, for all I know, a murderer into the bargain!”

“Probably not a murderer, I should say.”

“Ei, Herr Justizrath,” retorted Hanne angrily, “it’s all very fine for you to be so cool about it, and to take the fellow’s part! but you wouldn’t like such rascals haunting your own house, I’ll warrant me!”

“Perhaps, Frau Lehmann, it will be right and dutiful on your part to state what I have told you to the farmer, and——”

“Dutiful! I know my duty, thank ye. My duty is to keep my household safe and decent, and I’m sure they can be neither whilst such goings on are rife. If Franz don’t make that young baggage swear never to speak to the charcoal-burner again, either she or me leaves the farm, that’s all.”

"Ay, ay! Well you must settle that with your husband."

"O, I'll settle it, never fear! I wish you good-day, Herr Justizrath. You'll not take it amiss if I have spoken a bit hasty?"

"By no means. Christian! — O, here is Christian. Open the door for Frau Lehmann, if you please."

"Frau von Groll's servant has just been here, Herr Justizrath," said the clerk, "and she brought word that the Herr Major is come back, and would be glad to see you this evening if you will be kind enough to step over to his house about half-past six o'clock."

"Ah, really! I'm delighted! Good day, Frau Lehmann. Greet the farmer for me, and Lieschen. Poor little Lieschen! Ha, ha, ha! Well, we all have our troubles. Good day." Hanne stamped out of the office, still in a high tempest of anger. She longed to get home again, that she might vent her wrath on some one. I am inclined to think that Herr Peters's drive home was not altogether a pleasant one: and as to the pony,—it was most fortunate for that phlegmatic animal that his master handled the whip instead of the representative of the softer sex who sat beside him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO PHILOSOPHERS.

It is among the commonest of human experiences that “our own way,” which, with more or less energy, we all desire, proves, when gained, to be but a painful, thorny way,—a way plentifully strewn with sharp stones, and leading to quite other issues than such as we anticipated when, in spite of dumb opposition from facts, we entered so eagerly upon it, mainly because it was “our own way.” In truth, we see clearly the beginning of the pathway, but the end whither it conducts us is hidden. There comes a turn in the road, and, behold! we are no longer in “our own way,” but in some far different way, which nathless we must follow to the end. The proverb asserts that we are never too old to learn. But alas! if we be too old to profit by the learning! That is bitter.

Some such thoughts floated in Simon Schnarcher’s brain as he sat convalescent, and all but cured of his

late rheumatic attack, in the arm-chair in his kitchen. The smoke from his constant friend, the meerschaum, curled up and floated away lightly above the old man's head. Once before we have seen Simon Schnarcher casting a mournful, yearning look on the past. That was when Otto's boyish face, beheld by him for the first time, had conjured up softening memories of his dead sister Dorothea, the head-ranger's mother. Now again his meditations tended that way, but they were sadder than before. In each case they began and ended with that pregnant syllable "if." But then the "if" had reference to the future; now it alluded only to the past. And, oh! the difference betwixt "if it yet may be," and "if it but had been!"

"If I had let the lad follow the bent of his mind and turn Jäger,—why, he might have stood in his father's shoes, and been head-ranger of Detmold by now almost. If I could have known what like the lass was, and what pleasant, soft ways she has with her,—almost like Dorothea's, her voice is sometimes,—I might have thought better of it. But there,"—with a sudden access of ill-humour, as the pipe was smoked out, and the curling clouds no longer curtained him in—to the god-like solitude of smokers,—"there, nobody told me. Nobody said that she was different from any other doll-faced minx. And Otto, too! Why didn't

he ask as a favour that I should let him lead a forest life,—though how any but dumb, wild beasts can love it, passes me!—instead of standing stiff and stubborn on his ‘conscience?’ As if at my years, and with my knowledge of the Scriptures, I didn’t understand what was good for his conscience better than a stripling like him. Ach Himmel! ‘Tis a bad world,—a hard, dreary, desolate kind of a world; specially for the old.”

That it lay with himself to soften this hardness and lighten this dreariness;—that the world mostly echoes our own tones, and if we cry aloud “hate” will surely never answer “love;”—that, in brief, a man reaps as he sows,—was simple wisdom not all unknown to the sacristan, but he thrust it down when it would have made its voice heard in his heart, being still stubborn and angry and ashamed of acknowledging what of good there was in him,—taking it for weakness.

None the less was he to be pitied,—rather more,—as he sat weak and solitary by his cold, white stove,—the lonely, loveless old man!—whilst the voices of birds and beasts and children, the hum of insects, the rustle of young budding foliage, and the sweet smell of the growing spring-time,—now nearly grown to summer,—floated past the open doorway, but never crossed the threshold of his home.

“Good evening, Herr Küster,” said a high thin voice, and Peters, the apothecary, peeped in at the window.

“What do ye say? I can’t hear through the glass, man! Come in or stay out, one or t’other.”

In truth, Simon Schnarcher was glad to see Peters. It was long since the old man had been able to visit the Pied Lamb, and to enjoy his position as chief of its evening society. The sight of Peters’s face, and the sound of Peters’s voice, were very agreeable to the sacristan in his solitude. But, then, they were agreeable chiefly as affording an earnest that he,—Simon,—would once more taste the keen delight of contradicting, browbeating, and overcoming in argument some antagonist better worth powder and shot than old Sophie. And yet all the while there was an odd mutual liking between these two old acquaintances and townsmen.

If Schnarcher enjoyed attacking, Peters certainly had some pleasure in resisting. He presented a mild, invincible, elastic kind of obstinacy to his antagonist; receiving his moral thwacks and pummellings much as an air-cushion might receive physical blows. But, at the same time the younger man had a vast respect for the intellect of the elder, and looked upon him as a personage of prodigious sagacity and experience.

"Glad to see you well again, Herr Küster," said Peters meekly, entering the kitchen.

"Who told you I was well? I'm not well. I'm very far from well. Take the chair with the cushion, can't ye?"

"Thank you kindly;—well, I will. These wooden seats are a bit hard and slippery. So you're not well, then?"

"No, I'm not; and I should think that a man mixed up with doctors and doctors' stuff all his life might have known that 'twasn't likely I should be well just yet, after the bout of rheumatism I've had of it! Well? If I was well I could reach down the tobacco-box from the back of the stove there; but as it is, you must get it and fill your meerschaum yourself." This was Simon's way of indicating that he expected his visitor to remain and have a chat with him.

Peters was a good deal touched by the old man's offer of tobacco. Schnarcher was usually so mean and grasping that a gift from him,—even of the most trifling kind,—was an event. A generous man might have starved himself to feed his guest without exciting so much gratitude. But such is the world's justice; and the world is the world even in Lippe-Detmold.

"Dear me," said the apothecary, after they had both smoked in silence for some minutes,—Schnarcher

having re-filled his own pipe to celebrate the occasion,—“dear me, women are queer creatures! I always thought so,—at least I have thought so ever since I was two-and-twenty, and that’s not yesterday,—but, bei meiner Treue, the longer I live the queerer I find ‘em! I ain’t an inch nearer to the reading of that riddle than I was at two-and-twenty.”

“Riddle!” echoed the sacristan scornfully. “Pshaw! folks make a riddle out of nothing. Why, I have heard say that there have been men that pretended to understand the language of animals; but if once you begin to bother your brains with watching and listening, and trying to make out what the beasts and the birds and the reptiles say to one another, you might easy craze your intellect altogether. But the wise man knows that they have no language, and that they mean just nothing at all;—beyond, it may be, sucking their young, hatching eggs, storing grass-seed and corn for the winter, and such like. You give your fancy way, and you may make riddles out of everything!”

“But they have immortal souls, have women! I’m sure a God-fearing man like you wouldn’t deny that, Herr Küster.”

“That, sir,” replied the sacristan decisively, “is a religious point. I don’t approve of arguing upon religious points out of season. No doubt women have

souls; but it's one of them mysteries that we ain't intended to understand in this world." There was a pause. "What set your head running upon women, Herr Peters?" demanded the sacristan. "You don't seem to be yourself at all this evening."

"Ach, allerdings, Herr Küster, I was a good deal put out yesterday. The fact is, I drove to Detmold with Franz Lehmann's wife."

"So!"

"Yes; but that wasn't so bad, barring that she wanted to flog the old Schimmel; but you know a woman can never be near a whip without her fingers itching to use it. She didn't give me any of her tantrums going. But coming back! Lord, it was awful!"

"Pooh!" sneered the sacristan with a sarcastic grin, "you're so faint-hearted! Why, what could she do? She couldn't bite you!"

"Sapperment! I don't know that! And what's more, I don't know but what I would rather have been bitten. She rattled a hailstorm of scolding words about my ears all the way home to Horn. I was quite ill,—I was indeed, Herr Küster. I took physic when I got home."

"Did you, though? Well, in truth, you must have been half-dazed to take physic;—for you know what it's made of. He, he, he!"

"Oh, but my drugs are very pure, Herr Küster,—very pure, indeed," answered the apothecary with imperturbable simplicity.

"What was the matter with the vixen?"

"Something had happened at Detmold to vex her. All I know is, that she came to me right early in the forenoon, and asked me for the loan of the Schimmel and the chaise to drive to Detmold. Well, as I had a little business to do there myself, and——"

"And as you are always glad of an excuse to be idle and gossip, eh?"

"Not altogether; no, no. It's true that I am fond of conversation, but then I like to talk to old friends who can say something worth hearing,—like yourself, Herr Küster." The old man acknowledged this compliment by a species of snort. "Well, in short, I drove Frau Lehmann to Detmold, and I left her at the land-steward's office, and she called for me afterwards at the Blue Pigeon, and we returned to Horn. And if she wasn't as sweet as honey going, I can assure you solemnly she was like a raging flame of fire when we were coming back."

"I suppose the Justizrath von Schleppers had been snubbing her a bit. You say she went to the land-steward's office?"

"Yes; but I don't fancy it was him she was angry



with. She went on storming and talking mostly to herself,—now high, now low; but she mainly abused ——” Herr Peters, who was not remarkable for tact or presence of mind, stopped short in his speech, and grew suddenly very red in the face.

“ Well? She mainly abused——? Who was it that she mainly abused?”

“ Ahem! I don't know,—that is,—it was some one——”

Another full stop. “ Tchah! ” snapped out the sacristan. “ Are you dreaming? Or has that scold frightened you out of your wits in earnest? Who was it she abused? ”

“ I,—I would rather not say.” If Peters had elaborately planned some method of making the sacristan persist in his demand, he could certainly not have hit upon a surer one than this.

“ You would rather not say! But I insist that you do say, Herr Peters. Do you suppose that I allow folks to treat me in that manner in my own house? ”

“ Don't be angry, Herr Küster. It is,—really and truly,—more on your account than my own that I didn't like to mention——”

“ Grant me patience! What do you mean, you ninny? More on my account, quotha! Did the woman abuse me? And do you imagine for one instant

that I should care a red Heller about it, if she did?"

"No, no; she didn't abuse you, Herr Küster. But she was in a terrible rage against,—your nephew." Peters almost trembled as he uttered the word, expecting an outbreak of anger from the sacristan. But the latter leant back in his chair quite silently, and did not even look up for some minutes. Encouraged by this calm, Peters went on. "She'll lead them all a pleasant life at the farm for the next day or two. The power of tongue that woman has is beyond anything I ever heard of! I wouldn't be her husband for—— O Lord!"

The apothecary remained speechless and overwhelmed by the horror of the image he had conjured up. Presently, by way of changing the disagreeable topic, Peters pulled a queer little newspaper, about the size of a lady's handkerchief, from his pocket. It was printed on coarse, greyish paper, and one page of it was filled with advertisements of an oddly confidential kind. Here, "a brave maiden, of respectable connections, desired a place in a Bürger family, being competent to do the house work and cooking, and having a peculiar talent for darning!" There, "two young men of good character could be accommodated with bed and board and cheerful con-



versation, in the house of a tradesman." And another advertisement set forth that "Ludwig Schwelin of Detmold, and Adelgunde Burgstein of Paderborn, were last week solemnly betrothed to each other in the latter city; and invited absent friends and acquaintances to sympathize with their deep heart-contentment." But these domestic details were not what interested Herr Peters in his newspaper. He was eager after the political intelligence, and followed attentively the fluctuating announcements which prophesied, in see-saw fashion, Peace;—War;—War;—Peace;—Conference;—No Conference;—Armament;—Disarmament;—and so forth.

"It really is most extraordinary," said the apothecary, spreading out the little journal and smoothing it with his hand, "most extraordinary to behold how things are going in Europe. Just think what heads these great statesmen must have, when it makes mine ache again only to try to understand their doings! The last news by electric telegraph,—you remember our talk about the Atlantic telegraph last autumn in Herr Quendel's Speise-Saal?—well, the last news from Berlin seems to be,—ay, here it is, May 31st, that was yesterday;—that the King has made a decree, saying that the old classes of the Landwehr won't be called out, even in the event of war, but those who did not

perform military duty from 1865 back to 1857, will be called out for inspection. Now, again, they talk in the newspapers as though the Conference really would come off, and——”

“Eh? What Conference? What is it?” asked the sacristan. The old man had sat silent and inattentive for some time; ever since, in fact, Peters had mentioned his nephew. But he now looked up sharply with his sunken, black eyes, and knocked the bowl of his pipe impatiently against the stove.

“What Conference, Herr Küster? Why, the Peace Conference, to be sure!—a kind of meeting to see if these kings and kaisers can’t settle their differences without fighting, after all.”

“Why, what are their differences?”

“Oh, their differences? Their differences are——. Well, I can’t rightly say. It’s somewhat puzzling to explain, you see. I have an idea of it in my head, but——. Anyway, if their Conference don’t come off, or comes off badly, we shall have Fatherland in a flame of war from end to end. That much is clear. You haven’t been following up the news lately I suppose, Herr Küster?”

The sacristan shrugged his bowed shoulders testily. “Following up the news? Don’t you know that I’ve been down in my bed with rheumatism nigh

upon three weeks? I don't want any of your politics or rigmaroles;—don't believe in 'em. But just tell me one thing. Will Prussia be in it if there's war?"

Peters stared at him in amazement. "Prussia! Why, Simon Schnarcher, don't you know——"

"No rigmaroles! One word,—yes or no!"

"Yes; to be sure, then. Here's the newspaper." The sacristan put back the offered paper with a trembling hand, and his face changed strangely. "Are you ill? Can I do anything?" cried Peters, rising hurriedly.

"Leave me alone, and hold your tongue, if you can," was the sacristan's answer. Then he closed his eyes and remained motionless in his chair. Peters obeyed his injunction as far as holding his tongue. But he stared uneasily at the old man, and drew nearer to him.

"It is not a faint," pronounced the apothecary, after looking well into the wrinkled, yellow face with shut eyelids. "What can be the matter with him? Prussia! Was, zum Henker! What in heaven's name can he care about Prussia?"

The silence was broken by the entrance of Sophie. She was flushed and excited, and had evidently been crying. "'N abend," she said curtly, abbreviating her

salutation of “guten abend,” to the apothecary, with a snap, and instantly preparing to lay the supper.

The sacristan opened his eyes. “You’ll be going to the Pied Lamb, Herr Peters,” he said, in the tone less of an inquiry than a command.

“Well, no; as I told you, I have not been quite well since yesterday. I think I shall go straight to my house, and to my bed.”

“So.”

“Good night, Herr Küster. Good night, Sophie. You seem to be a little out of sorts, too.”

“Ach Gott! There’s been such a to-do at Lehmann’s farm!—enough to make a body out of sorts.”

Herr Friedrich Peters betook himself home, pondering many things. He pondered as to what could have been the “to-do,”—as old Sophie called it,—at Lehmann’s farm, which had so agitated her. “But I knew that woman would make the house hot for everybody as soon as she got home!” said Peters to himself. “She was primed with mischief like one of these dreadful new-fangled guns; and she’s nearly as dangerous!” Then he pondered how it had come to pass that Horn, which was for so long a pleasant, quiet, friendly little town, should lately have grown to be a perfect hornet’s nest of stings and danger! “One daren’t say a word! Not one word, I declare, for fear

of hurting some one, or being hurt. And the more I consider, and trace things to their sources, the more I see that women are at the bottom of all the mischief. If head-ranger Hemmerich hadn't fallen in love with the charcoal-burner's daughter, his uncle Schnarcher would never have quarrelled with him ; and if he had never quarrelled with him, Otto would have been brought up different ; and if Otto had been brought up different, Lehmann's wife would never have taken such a dislike to him ; and he himself would not have opposed his uncle and wanted to marry a penniless little lass, as his father did before him. And then, —poor little Lieschen!—nice little maid. As pretty as a flower ;—pity!—all the women's fault,—h'm, —h'm!"

And here Herr Peters, who had pursued his meditations during his progress through the street, and his preparation for bed, fell asleep while the twilight was still glimmering in at his curtainless window.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOPHIE.

SOPHIE, as she set forth the sacristan's very frugal, not to say parsimonious, supper, muttered to herself in grumbling tones, and every now and then heaved a deep sigh, or wiped her eyes on her apron. Her grief, however, was clearly of the kind which is so mixed with resentment, that a hearty outburst of scolding would be more likely to relieve it than a flood of tears. Sophie seldom scolded. She was an ignorant, honest, warm-hearted old woman, whose world was narrower even than that of most of her neighbours; having been bounded, for forty years, by the sacristan's garden fence on the one hand, and the wall of St. Mary's churchyard on the other. Within these limits,—which included a small portion of the town of Horn that lay between them,—Sophie Wagner had lived, and moved, and had her being, for full forty years. She had been a buxom, blue-eyed young woman of eight-and-twenty

when she had first entered the service of the sacristan's mother, and she had never since quitted the Schnarchers' cottage for a day.

Sophie had never had husband and children to divide her allegiance with the sacristan's family. Once, a long, long time ago,—a lifetime ago!—she had had a sweetheart. One of the labourers on her father's tiny farm had fallen in love with Sophie's blue eyes and smiling, sun-burnt face. And she had had her day-dreams,—poor Sophie!—of a humble home of her own, shared with Hans. But it was not to be. Hans had no money, and one great vice. He was a drunkard. So Sophie's father, as soon as he found out how matters stood, got rid of his best ploughman,—for Hans, when sober, was worth any two others on the farm,—and sent his daughter to service, in order, as he said, to put all such nonsense out of her head. Thus Sophie Wagner's one bit of romance was killed and buried; and by the time she first came into the sacristan's household the grass had long been green upon its grave. You could not have squeezed a tear from her eye by talking to her of Hans all a long summer's day.

'Twas a deal better as it was. What would have become of her with a drunken husband, and perhaps little helpless children to feed and tend? Though,

to say truth, she did believe at the time, that if Hans could have had her for his wife, he would have amended and grown steady. And one thing was quite certain; you wouldn't find a young fellow in all Detmold now-a-days that could do a day's ploughing with Hans. No; and, for her part, she didn't think many of 'em were near so straight-made and tall.

The grass was quite green and fresh and healthy on the grave of Sophie's one romance. But perhaps some portion of its impalpable spirit had survived through the long years, and filled old Sophie's heart with tender sympathy for the love-story that was now being acted before her eyes, and made her,—for the first time during her forty years of service,—act in opposition to the sacristan. Even in doing so, however, she did not blame her master; still less would she suffer others to blame him in her hearing. No; Sophie, in truth, blamed herself for her disobedience,—but she helped the lovers.

The sacristan sat glum and silent while the hard cheese, black bread, and butter were being set forth. There was a bowl of hot coffee and milk for him, as being still an invalid. Sophie's beverage was beer. "What's the matter with you?" asked old Simon, becoming aware of his faithful handmaiden's red nose

and swollen eyelids as she sat opposite to him at the supper-table.

“Ei, Herr Küster, don’t you mind me. Try and take your coffee. I didn’t skim the milk. I thought ‘twould be more nourishing for you with the cream on.”

Simon Schnarcher raised a great horn spoon, full of the hot brown coffee, to his lips, and then paused before swallowing the liquid, to contemplate Sophie. Her eyes were cast down, so that she was not aware of her master’s gaze, and she was forming inaudible words with her lips, and bobbing her head emphatically backwards and forwards, until the frill of her mob cap was within a hair’s breadth of the flame of the candle. The sacristan returned the spoonful of coffee untasted to the bowl. “Sophie!” he cried, bringing his open palm sharply down upon the table, “do you know you all but had your foolish old head on fire?”

“Ach gnädiger Himmel!”

“Ay, it’s all very well to screech out ‘gnädiger Himmel!’ but if your cap had caught fire you’d have been burnt to death;—to death, d’ye hear? And, likely enough, me too, and the house, and everything else. I couldn’t have put you out; a poor, crippled old man like me! What on earth is the matter with you? It isn’t enough the troubles I have to bear of my own, in mind and body,—mind and body!—but all manner of

foolish persons must throw their foolishness on my shoulders."

Sophie was very penitent and a good deal frightened. And presently, despite her unwillingness to speak fully, her master drew from her the fact that she had been sorely put out by witnessing a scene of domestic discord at Franz Lehmann's farm. In answer to the question what took her there, she boldly said she had gone to consult the Hausfrau about some remedy for a disorder which was making sad ravages amongst the sacristan's poultry. She was very much astonished by the old man's exclaiming with totally unlooked-for vehemence, "How dare you ask that woman anything? I don't believe she understands poultry."

"Oh, she does, she does indeed, Herr Küster!"

"Well, if she does, I'd rather lose 'em all,—let 'em die every one, than that she should cure them."

"Lose them all! Let them die! Du lieber Herr! And they worth——"

"No matter what they're worth. I tell you I won't have bird or beast of mine doctored by that Jezebel. Potztäusend! I ain't used to have my word disputed in my own house. I have said it; it's for you to obey."

"O ja, Herr Küster," replied Sophie, meekly. And then the sacristan proceeded to take his coffee.

But Sophie, meditating on the old man's words and manner, wondered much what had occurred to make her master so bitterly hostile to Frau Lehmann. So far as she knew, the sacristan had never displayed any animosity towards Hanne. He had often called her a vixen and a spit-fire, it was true ; but that had been in a kind of grim jocoseness rather than serious railing. And on the other hand, she,—Sophie,—well knew that Frau Lehmann always expressed a high respect for the sacristan, and a general approbation of his conduct and character. “No ; I should have said they almost liked each other, them two. And 'twas natural they should,” reflected Sophie, naïvely, “for I don't believe they ever spoke a dozen words one to the other in their lives!” Then the idea entered her head that she might take advantage of the sacristan's mood to enlist his sympathies in favour of Lieschen. For Sophie was ever on the watch for the time,—which she had faith would certainly arrive,—when, as she told Lieschen, “it would all come right in the end.”

So she tried the ground cautiously, by pitying Franz Lehmann for having so sharp-tongued and violent-tempered a wife ; and finding this was received without rebuke, she gradually proceeded to give as graphic an account as she could of the scene she had been witness to at the farm. The Hausfrau had come back from

Detmold the previous day, in a terrible temper. But, according to the account of Lotte and Marthe,—who had stolen into the barn to give Sophie various details and get rid of a little of their suppressed indignation,—she had not flamed out into open anger, as was her usual way. She had merely worried and harassed every creature about the place, from Claus down to the gooseherd, with injunctions and warnings and threats, many times reiterated, respecting the necessity of locking and guarding store-rooms and hen-house, barn and byre, in view of the abandoned thievish reprobates who in these latter days were walking to and fro upon the earth, seeking whom they might devour. And she had prepared them all for the breaking of a very terrible storm as soon as “her man” should return from Lemgo.

Nor did the event belie the apprehensions of the household; for Franz Lehmann had not been at home half an hour before the Hausfrau’s voice was heard, loud and shrill, from the kitchen. Then followed the husband’s deeper tones, angrily rolling out; and the trembling servants, listening in the barn, could distinguish at intervals a stifled sound of sobbing from Lieschen. Presently the kitchen-door had been thrown violently open, scattering the group of listeners like leaves before the wind, and, one by one, all the farm-

labourers who dwelt on the premises were called in and questioned as to their knowledge of a certain charcoal-burner who had lately been seen about the place. "I went in, nothing doubting, in the midst of the hub-bub," said Sophie; "and I give you my word, Herr Küster, 'twas like the Tower of Babel, if it be not profane to say so! The farmer looked like an angry bull. And he was puzzled too, I could see. The farm folks were talking all together, and Frau Lehmann's voice rose above all."

"I'll warrant it!" said the sacristan.

"And her face was as red as a poppy; and she kept on screeching out, 'She or me! she or me! You can choose, Franz Lehmann; but I won't stay here to be murdered in my bed by her friends and associates!'"

"What did she mean by that?"

"Oh, the Lord knows, Herr Küster! But it was right pitiful to see that poor little maiden, sobbing and shaking, and as white as a bleached web. And she crept up to the farmer, and she says, 'Oh, let me go!' she says, 'I can get another place, perhaps. Let me go to service again. I bring nothing but mischief and trouble to them that's kind to me.' And the farmer, he stood there rubbing his hair up and down, and frowning as if his two eyebrows would grow into one.

And I could see quite plain that he didn't know what to be at a bit in the world."

"Dummkopf!" exclaimed old Simon, with bitter contempt. "What he should have been at was to have given yon scolding jade a sound drubbing with a good leather strap, and then have locked her up on bread and water for a month."

"Ei jawohl, Herr Küster," acquiesced Sophie as readily as though her master had proposed the most mild and ordinary proceeding in the world. "But she is real masterful when her blood's up, is Frau Hanne."

"Tchah! I'd master her!"

"And then the Hausfrau, she cries out with a kind of laugh, 'You go to service again? I'd ask nothing better. But who would take you in all the Principality,' she says, 'when it's known how you have behaved? And I shall tell the truth about you, you may be sure. And my good word or my bad word is worth something yet. Though, Heaven knows,' she says, 'that my will is good to get rid of you!'"

"The woman is puffed up with pride and evil temper till she doesn't know herself. Her word worth something, indeed!"

"Well, she was screeching in a passion, you see, Herr Küster; and she didn't care what words she laid her tongue to, so long as they hurt."

When the sacristan was in his bed, and before Sophie took the light away, he bade her wait a moment, and said in his wonted harsh manner, "I'll tell you what, Sophie ; you're getting very old."

"Jenun, Herr Küster, we don't either of us grow younger," rejoined Sophie, with much calmness.

"No ; we don't. And if age brings wisdom, it brings weakness too ;—weakness of the body, Sophie. I have made up my mind for some time past that I would get a young wench to help you in the house-work."

"Ach, no need for that yet awhile!"

"But I say there is need! Only, decent, God-fearing, modest maidens are hard to find now-a-days. I fancy that lass from Lehmann's might suit, if we could get her for a fair moderate wage. She wouldn't be worth very much, for she don't look exactly as strong as a horse ; but she's young, — and, — and handy."

Sophie stared at her master open-mouthed ; and in her agitation approached the tallow candle which she held, so near to her linen neckerchief as to threaten a realization of the sacristan's uttered apprehensions that she would be burnt to death. "Do you mean,—you don't mean Lie——?"

"You wish to be roasted alive then?" interrupted

Simon Schnarcher, pointing with crooked yellow finger at the flickering flame. "It's time there was some one to look after you! I mean that lass from Lehmann's who comes here sometimes. It's with her that scold was quarrelling, isn't it?"

"Ja gewiss!"

"Then I tell you what you do. You go up to the farm to-morrow morning, and you speak to Franz Lehmann, and you tell him from me that I'm in want of a servant, and that I hear he's parting with one of his, and that if she's willing to come here, I'm willing to take her. And you can say, too, that I shan't trouble his wife for a character, being old enough to judge for myself." And the sacristan grinned sardonically.

"Ei Du lieber Himmel! But, Herr Küster——"

"Hold your tongue, and go to bed. And don't set the house a-fire, if you can help it."

"Good night, Herr Küster."

"Good night!"

"I wonder," proceeded Sophie, suddenly, and more than half scared at her own boldness, "I do so wonder where my poor Otto is to-night, and whether he has a decent place to lay his head in!"

"Woman!" cried the sacristan in a terrible voice that made the old woman jump, "how dare you? I

have forbidden you to mention that name. The next time you wilfully disobey me, old friends as we are, we part!" With that he turned his head resolutely on his pillow, and shut his eyes. Sophie went to her rest with her thoughts in a very tangled skein, which she had not wit enough to unravel.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MOROCCO CASE.

MAJOR VON GROLL had been home nearly a week, and during that time the Justizrath had of course had many colloquies with him. The Justizrath found his chief's mind much bent upon the elucidation of the mystery involved in Baron Ernest Dornberg's words, as reported by the priest, Nepomuk Souka. And Von Schleppers felt himself bound to own that Frau von Groll's knowledge of her husband's character was, in the main, very accurate. The idea of trying to get back the sum of ready money entrusted to the priest's hand by the dying man, Von Schleppers did not venture, even distantly, to suggest to the Major ; despite the constant urging of the fair Amalia that he should do so.

Frau von Groll, as she saw the prospect of enjoying a handsome competence opening before her, clung more and more fondly to those lost gulden, fallen so unmercifully into what she called "the claws of a Jesuit."

They were her roc's egg, without which the possession of her new-found palace was but barren. But one day, in despair of inducing the Justizrath to make the proposition in his capacity of legal adviser, Amalia broached the subject to her husband herself. Her success was not such as to encourage her to persist, and she wisely withdrew her proposition, affecting to be convinced by the Major's arguments that the Reverend Nepomuk Souka was a worthy, conscientious, pious man, and that the testimony of the Baron's two old servants in his favour was,—setting all mere opinion aside,—irrefragable. It is almost needless to say, however, that Frau von Groll, being thus baffled, carefully laid aside the topic of the lost gulden, and kept it freshly embalmed in her memory, as a good, solid, tangible grievance, which would stand wear and tear, and might be brought forth for the discomfiture of the recalcitrant Major on any fitting future opportunity.

Meanwhile her desire to take speedy possession of the Dornberg property in Saxony, chimed in with the Justizrath's interests so completely, that the two worked for the same object in a species of alliance which if not altogether like other great and historical alliances, was yet a very complete understanding. That the thoroughness of their mutual understanding

militated considerably against its cordiality, was unfortunately true ! But neither Amalia von Groll nor Friedrich von Schleppers was apt to care about that.

The Justizrath duly examined the papers which Major von Groll had brought with him from Bohemia, and found all those relating to business matters in perfect order. "It is really remarkable," said the Justizrath, "to find such clearness and method in the arrangement of documents and memoranda. And I am the more surprised, because I have been given to understand that the late Baron Dornberg was, in his youth, quite a brilliant man of pleasure, and, if I may say so, almost a prodigal son."

"I never knew him intimately, at any period of his life," replied the Major. "But they told me that after his marriage he grew very fond of money, and looked sharply into his accounts."

"Ach, so ! Ay, ay ! Well, people will naturally trouble themselves about what they are fond of." Then the Justizrath would make the methodical accuracy observable in the late Baron's papers, a text whereon to enlarge respecting the unlikeliness that a man so habitually clear and cautious should have left any matter of importance to be settled by a few deathbed sentences, spoken to a priest. And he would point out to the Major that it was much more conceivable that

the dying man's mind should have been wandering at the last, than that there was really any weighty secret connected with the woman's portrait found in his cabinet.

To these representations Major von Groll found no immediate answer. But after having painfully revolved the matter in his mind for a day or two, he hammered out the retort, that, however unlikely or inconceivable such a thing might have been, *à priori*, yet they did unquestionably know that Baron Ernest Dornberg had in fact left one matter of importance to be settled "by a few deathbed sentences, spoken to a priest," and might therefore have left other matters of importance in like manner.

"Ay," said the Justizrath, looking a good deal surprised, "do we unquestionably know that? What is it you allude to, Herr Major?"

"Good heavens! His conversion to the Roman Catholic religion, of course!"

"Oh!"

"Surely that was a matter of importance, if ever there was one."

"Ach, yes; to be sure. Very important, no doubt; —of the highest importance. But,—that is altogether a different thing."

Frau von Groll was very anxious, as has been said,

to take possession of the Dornberg property. She thought that once duly installed as its rightful owner, all danger of her husband's mounting his hobby, and riding it in any ruinously Quixotic direction, would be much abated. "There can be nobody to dispute my claim to my brother's property," she kept telling herself, with zealous iteration. "But still possession is a great thing. I wish we were in Saxony!"

On his side the Justizrath desired with some impatience that Major von Groll should send in his resignation of the post of land-steward. He also,—the Justizrath,—felt that possession was a great thing. And quite independently of the possibility of a new claimant arising to the Dornberg estates, the Justizrath had considerable reason to desire that the Von Grolls should depart as speedily as possible;—their departure and his own promotion being, in his mind, almost one and the same thing,—for the aspect of affairs in Europe rendered it more and more probable that a great war would soon break out. Now the Dornberg estate was situated near the Elbe in the Saxon Switzerland, and as long ago as the beginning of May it had been positively asserted by a portion of the public press, that Prussian and Austrian troops were immediately about to march on Saxony. That announcement had not been verified by facts; and since it had

been made, the project of a European congress had assumed some transient form of likelihood. Still the Justizrath von Schleppers, in common with the rest of the world, was well convinced that in the event of war Saxony would in all probability be one of the principal battle-grounds. And even Frau von Groll,—“rapacious little harpy,” as he was discourteous enough to style her,—would scarcely rush to seize her inheritance through the cross fire of two hostile cannonades.

No ; the Justizrath felt that in this case, if in no other, delays were dangerous. Of course Mathilde had seen her dear friend Amalia, also, several times. For some weeks she had been almost the only person admitted to Frau von Groll’s drawing-room. But after the Major’s return from Bohemia there was no longer an excuse for excluding those members of the “starry circle” who wished to pay their respects and gratify their curiosity at the same time. There was no excuse for excluding the starry ones, for Baron Dornberg had been dead nearly two months, and,—and the mantuamaker had sent home the black silk gown ! The sombre grandeur of this mourning garment would have been more impressive had there been a little more of the garment itself. It was to a certain extent what I have heard described by a contemptuous

lady's maid as "scrimpy," being neither long nor ample nor rich in the flow of its drooping folds. But this circumstance scarcely marred its effect in the eyes of the economical ladies of Detmold. Of them, almost to a woman, it might be said, as was sung of John Gilpin's admirable helpmate, that

" — though on pleasure they were bent,
They had a frugal mind."

The black silk gown was very stiff, and made a crackling noise whenever its wearer moved; and Frau von Groll was perfectly satisfied with her dress and herself, as she sat in state to receive visitors, making the one blot of darkness on the vividly-coloured upholstery of her drawing-room. Mathilde von Schleppers' short reign was over. I amend my phrase,—her regency was over. She promised herself that she would presently mount the social throne, and enjoy undivided supremacy. Meanwhile the fickle "world" ran to Frau von Groll's, she being about to disappear from their ken,—not as a falling star, in which case they would probably have run in the opposite direction,—but as one translated to yet higher spheres.

The reunion at the Major's house on a certain evening after his return to Detmold, was very similar to one which was described in a former chapter, wherein I ventured to introduce the courteous reader to some of

the most select society of the miniature metropolis. But now, on the evening of which I am at present writing, there was one difference which did not pass unobserved by the guests, namely, that there was no coffee, weak or strong, provided for their refreshment. Whether Frau von Groll had any idea that being still ostensibly plunged in woe herself, it behoved her to starve her guests by way of lugubriously honouring her brother's memory with a species of vicarious sacrifice ; or whether she merely considered that on the eve of her departure from Detmold it was not worth while to conciliate the Detmolders by any superfluous expenditure of comestibles, and that a cup of coffee saved was a cup of coffee gained, I am unable to decide with certainty. Possibly both motives had a share in her action.

The conversation ran chiefly upon the all-absorbing topic of the probabilities of war. The Justizrath von Schleppers, who was present, took every means which could safely be taken to prevent the Major from speaking of his visit to Bohemia ; desiring, for obvious reasons, that the details of Baron Dornberg's last moments should not be widely known for the present. It was not difficult to direct the talk into another channel. There was among the company that brother-officer of the Major's who had pitted himself once before against

the Professor respecting the prospects of war in Europe. These two gentlemen were very easily incited to recommence their verbal hostilities, and gradually they drew into the discussion most of the other guests.

Suddenly, during a temporary lull in the rather noisy debate, every one was startled by a shrill little scream from Fräulein Bopp. That lady had recently become more sentimental than ever. Her manner was marked by a languishing melancholy which the observers of her own sex attributed to the fascinations of the Professor. But as poor Fräulein Bopp was known to have passed through several such phases of romantic sentiment for various ungrateful individuals, her melancholy excited no particular attention. On the present occasion she had withdrawn herself from the group of talkers, and was turning over some books of photographs which were symmetrically disposed on a side table. All at once, as has been said, she uttered a shrill exclamation which drew all eyes upon her.

“Ach Himmel! You made me jump,” cried the hostess, taking no steps whatever to investigate the cause of the scream. The others advanced to the table, and Frau von Schleppers demanded majestically what was the matter.

“Oh, bitte, bitte! I beg everybody’s pardon for

startling them, but I really could not help it," said Fräulein Bopp, excitedly. "Do but look, Frau von Schleppers! Only see, Herr Professor! Schön,—himmlisch schön! And what a likeness! Don't you recognise it?"

She held in her hand a dark morocco case, nearly square, being about eight inches long, and seven broad. One might at first sight have mistaken it for a book, and it opened as a book opens. But it contained neither printed nor written page. One side of it when open revealed a dark crimson velvet lining; on the other was set, within a dead gold rim, the portrait of a woman. There was a general chorus of exclamations, under cover of which Amalia whispered angrily to the Justizrath, who stood near her: "Sehen Sie doch! That meddlesome creature has got hold of the picture! And I begged Ferdinand to lock it up in his room. It is really too tiresome. Now we shall have him prosing about the whole story before these people."

Frau von Groll by no means knew all the mischief which Fräulein Bopp's ill-timed discovery was capable of causing. The Justizrath, however, perceived it all at a glance; and very much astonished and alarmed would the poor spinster have been could she have read the sentiments regarding herself which filled the lawyer's breast as she passed the portrait from hand to

hand, expatiating all the while upon its beauty and its extraordinary resemblance to "that sweet little maiden at the farm."

"What, what? What is it you say? Who is it so like, Fräulein Bopp?" asked the Major. Then Fräulein Bopp related the history of the expedition to Lehmann's farm, and called upon the Professor and Frau von Schleppers to corroborate her account of Lieschen's beauty and of her likeness to the portrait they were now contemplating.

"But you, yourself, Herr Justizrath," she continued, turning to Von Schleppers, "must perceive it. You know Lieschen's face very well. I ask you, might she not have sat for this picture?"

The Justizrath, with much deliberation, and somewhat more than his wonted slowness of movement, adjusted his tortoiseshell eye-glasses on his nose, and looked at the portrait. "Well, truly," said he, at length, "there is,—yes, there is a resemblance."

"So!" said Major von Groll, meditatively stroking his flaxen moustache. "You did not mention this when I first showed you the portrait."

"Ach lieber Himmel, my dear Major, was wollen Sie? Do you think I can carry all the pretty faces I see in my memory? Thirty years ago,—perhaps,—who knows?—I might have paid more attention to

such things. Ha, ha, ha!" And the Justizrath laughed softly, and rubbed his hands.

"Oh, but it is striking! Marvellous!" persisted Fräulein Bopp; and the Professor fully confirmed her. Frau von Schleppers continued to gaze at the lovely countenance in the morocco case.

"Dear me, yes," she said. "It is wonderfully like little Lieschen. Only this lady is handsomer. She has more colour, and her eyes are finer; and I should think she had been both taller and stouter than Lieschen. I wonder why she dressed her head in that fashion, like an actress on the stage!"

"Oh, it's a fancy costume evidently, and immensely becoming to that style of face," said Fräulein Bopp. "Do tell us who she was, Herr Major," she continued, clasping her hands and looking up in her most infantine manner. "I am sure she must have been a high-born, elegant creature! and graceful, and poetical, and,—and altogether enchanting!"

"Well, it is rather a singular circumstance," began the Major earnestly; but he was not allowed to proceed with his sentence.

"Ferdinand!" cried his wife sharply. "Ferdinand! I do beg and implore you not to begin on that subject. It is connected with things that worry me, as you very well know. And, indeed, I must say, that

considering how recent our bereavement is,—I being still,”—with much crackling of the black silk gown,—“in my first mourning,—I think it would be barely decent to discuss it. I am sure no one would wish to gratify their idle curiosity at the expense of my feelings.” The tone and manner which accompanied this speech rendered it indescribably rude, and effectually quenched all further attempt on poor Fräulein Bopp’s part to learn anything about the original of the portrait.

Every one in Detmold “society” was accustomed to rudeness from Frau von Groll, whose disregard of good manners was supreme, when it suited her to disregard them. And no one present thought of resenting their hostess’s contemptuous looks and words. Least of all, Fräulein Bopp, who meekly stammered out an apology,—although what she had to apologise for, she would have been puzzled to say. The party broke up very shortly.

Before retiring to rest, Frau von Groll seized upon the morocco case, and was about to lock it up securely in some hidden repository in her bed-chamber; but the Major very quietly took it out of her hand. “Ferdinand! Do let me put the thing away. It is shocking to have the portrait of such a creature lying about where every one can see it and ask

questions. Really, it is almost like an encouragement to vice!"

"Nay, Amalia," answered her husband, with gentle obstinacy, "I will take care that the sight of this portrait shall not offend you. But I prefer to have it where I can lay my hand upon it at a moment's notice."

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOLDIERS IN THE SOUTH.

Of all wars which can afflict humanity, a war between men of kindred race, speaking the same language, and nurtured in the same traditions, is supposed to be the most terrible and deplorable. And yet, whosoever should have witnessed the scene taking place in a Saxon village on the twenty-fifth day of June, in the year of grace, eighteen hundred and sixty-six, would scarcely have been inclined to believe that the principalities and powers of the earth had cried “Havoc! and let slip the dogs of war,” over the fair old German Fatherland.

Prince Frederick Charles of Prussia had his headquarters at Gorlitz, close to the Saxon frontier. And on the fifteenth of June, Prussian troops entered Saxony and occupied Löbau and Zittau. Detachments of the blue-coated Prussian soldiery were to be seen in many a peaceful hamlet round, and the glittering bayonets of their patrols lightened unexpectedly out of narrow

dusty country roads under the summer sunshine. But these were as yet the only symptoms of war to be discerned. In the little village of Goldenau, in the south-east corner of Saxony, close to the Bohemian frontier, a stranger who should have been carried thither and set down in the midst, after the fashion of the prince at the gates of Damascus in the Arabian story, might well have conjectured that some rustic festival was toward.

Bountifully fine weather had ripened the abundant crops of grass, and in many a meadow the mowers were at work, leaving behind them, as they moved onward, long lines of fragrant swath. Here and there, in some field already mown, might be seen a stalwart soldier with shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbow, handling the long rake and tossing the rich grass just beginning to turn tawny as it lay. Through the little village street horses were clattering up and down, being led to water at a huge stone trough fed by a trickling silver thread that fell into it from a source in the rock which formed one boundary of the high road through Goldenau. At the door of one of the best-looking houses stood three officers, leaning against the door-posts. One of them, the youngest,—with the gloss of his college lore still fresh upon him,—was reading attentively a little pocket edition of Suetonius. The other two were chatting

together as cheerily as though such murderous weapons as rifled cannon and needle-guns had never been invented ; and two toddling children of the owners of the house had got hold of a sword, which one of the officers had unbuckled and laid down upon a seat within the entrance-porch, and were dragging it with mighty fuss and clatter up and down the stone-flagged kitchen. At the village well, a broad-shouldered grave corporal was gallantly filling pitcher after pitcher for a group of lasses, some shame-faced, some giggling,—all casting furtive glances of curiosity at the “ Preusse.” And beneath a spreading tree at the gate leading from a hay-field into the road, some sunburnt, white-haired urchins had carried a specimen of the terrible Zündnadel-gewehr, and were cramming into the muzzle of it a bunch of poppies and wild eglantine from the hedge.

The soldier to whom the weapon belonged had been helping the haymakers, and was now sitting under the shade of the tree reading a letter. So absorbed was he by its contents, that he did not perceive the singular use to which the urchins aforesaid were putting his gun,—turning it into a gigantic and certainly very original bouquet-holder. His attention was called to the fact by a comrade, who chanced to pass down the road, leading an officer’s horse, and who observed that it was lucky the Hauptmann had not witnessed so very

irregular a proceeding instead of himself, the Hauptmann's orderly.

Thus rebuked, the soldier sprang to his feet and scattered the young Saxons in dismay. But though he shouted at them lustily, and even, perhaps, swore a mild oath or two, as he carefully and anxiously cleansed his weapon from its floral decorations, the little ones, with childhood's unerring instinct, knew very well, on looking into the "Preussen's" face, that they had neither severity nor brutal roughness to fear from him. And presently they gathered round again, watching his proceedings with much self-possession.

"Now," said he, when he had satisfied himself that no damage had been done to his precious gun, "look here, Kleine! This isn't a plaything. If you touch it again, it will likely enough go off and blow you into little pieces. And then what would your mothers say to you? Be off and roll in the hay this moment, or I shall report you to the Herr Hauptmann, and he'll have you all arrested and put in prison for a year and a day." Having delivered which impressive harangue, he sat down again under the tree and betook himself once more to the perusal of his letter.

The young soldier in the Prussian uniform was of course Otto Hemmerich. To no other wearer of that dark blue military costume will it be my business to

direct the special attention of my reader. The letter which he was engaged in reading had reached him that morning, in answer to one despatched by him some time previously to Horn, wherein he had announced his enlistment into his Prussian Majesty's —th regiment of the line, and had told Liese how and where a letter from her would be most likely to reach him. As he read, he kept pushing the curly brown locks from his forehead with the air of one who is both surprised and puzzled. The brown locks had been shorn very close, in military fashion, but they still curled crisply over his temples, and he thrust his fingers through them in his earnest pondering, until they stood up comically.

“Lieschen in my uncle's house ! Liese Lehmann in the sacristan's cottage !” he muttered, staring at the written words, as though he could scarcely believe his eyes. “Well, after that, nothing can seem wonderful !” So thought Otto, then, but he was destined to own himself wrong. Presently a pensive look came into Otto's bright blue eyes, and he kissed the letter in his hand with grave tenderness. “My Lieschen,” he whispered, “my beloved, my wife ! Gentle, soft, little dove, in the strange nest ! It is as if God's angels were watching over thee, little one, and touching my uncle's heart in thy favour. As to forgiving, I forgave him long ago ; but I shall thank and bless the

old man if he will be kind to thee, and give thee a home and a shelter when, perhaps, I——. Ach Gott! what a fool I am! And worse,—an ungrateful fool. All is going well; and I did a good thing for everybody when I came away. Of course I did a good thing; for I did my duty as far as I knew how. The rest is with One above.” And Otto dashed some hot tears from his eyes, and wiped the blistered letter paper with the cuff of his blue coat. To avoid recapitulating what is already known to the reader, I will only lay before him such extracts from Lieschen’s letter as serve for the elucidation of my story. The document in its entirety might be worth giving, were it not that we have already seen a specimen in extenso of Lieschen’s epistolary powers.

After relating how, much to her amazement, an application had been made to Franz Lehmann, by old Sophie, on the sacristan’s behalf, that she,—Lieschen,—should go to Simon Schnarcher’s house as servant, waiting-maid, and general aide-de-camp to old Sophie, and describing, with many “ands” and “buts,” the reception of the said application by the farmer and his wife, she proceeded thus;—“So I came to the Herr Küster’s ten days ago. And Cousin Hanne is still very angry. Only Cousin Franz says that she is quite unreasonable, for she said she wished to get rid of me.

Don't be too angry with her, Otto, for indeed I did seem to bring trouble and vexation, although I can't rightly see that it was all my fault. Cousin Franz is glad that I am so near them, if I must go to service again at all. He didn't want me to go. But I wanted to, for I think it was best. And then to be in your uncle's house is better to me than being in the Prince's Schloss at Detmold, because you never lived in the Prince's Schloss, dear Otto, but you did live here, and everything reminds me of you so. And you mustn't think I want reminding, for I don't, only I like to live where you lived, that's all." . . . "I have not seen your cousin Joachim since the morning after that night I have told you of, when your dear letter came. I think that Cousin Hanne frightened him, perhaps. For she was very cross because I spoke to him, and when Cousin Hanne is cross, you know, she might frighten people who didn't know that she can be really kind and good sometimes, though I am very sorry that lately she has seemed to be so displeased with me. What do you think your cousin Joachim wanted to say to my cousin Franz? He is rather strange in his manners, your cousin Joachim, don't you think? But please do not fill up your next letter with answering silly questions like this, but tell me everything about yourself, for that is all I care for in the world."

... "Herr Peters came the other night. He is right friendly to me always. He talked to the Herr Küster, and said that war was as good as proclaimed. The Herr Küster was rather wroth with him, and said he would that all the meddling fools who made the war had to fight. But Herr Peters seemed glad, and stood up that it would be a fine thing for Fatherland in the end. Only when I heard them talking, I trembled so that I could not hold the jug steady to pour out the Herr Küster's beer. And he sent me to bed, for he said I was tired. But it wasn't tiredness, Otto ; and before I went he laid his hand on my head, and said, 'Thou art a good maiden. The Lord do so by me, as I use thee well and take care of thee.' Then he said, 'If there were any who loved thee well, it might be good for them to know that I look upon thee as a daughter, and that thou shalt never want whilst I live nor after I am gone.' Was it not strange, Otto ? And he never called me, thou, before, but ever since that night he does so always. It all made me cry very much, mein bester Freund, and yet it was not quite all sorrow. And when I fell asleep I dreamt, oh ! such strange things ; and the last was that you were in a battle, and I heard the cannon thundering, and at every bang there came, my heart seemed to make twenty beats ; and after all it was only Sophie knocking with

a stick at the wall of my room to wake me in the morning."

Towards the end of the letter were these words:—

"The Major von Groll is going away directly from Detmold. My old master, the Justizrath von Schleppers, is sure to be land-steward in his place, everybody says. Last Wednesday the Herr Major von Groll rode over to Horn on a beautiful horse out of the Prince's Marstall, and he went to the farm, and after a while Cousin Franz sent down little Heinrich the gooseherd to fetch me, and I couldn't think why I was wanted until the foolish thought came into my head that it was something about you, dear Otto. But it was not. The Herr Major looked at me as though I had been a ghost, and then he whispered something to Cousin Franz, and Cousin Franz answered, 'Ach leider, it is just as I told you, gnädiger Herr.' And then he kissed me, and bade me run away to the sacristan again. And I hear tell in Horn that the Land-steward von Groll rode away again from the farm without seeing Cousin Hanne, and that she is quite offended about it. I am right sorry. She is nearly always angry now, and it must be terrible to be always angry, nicht wahr, dear Otto?"

"How very strange!" said Otto to himself, as he read his letter for the second or third time attentively.

“The Major von Groll wanting to speak to Farmer Lehmann about Lieschen ! and Joachim wanting to speak to Farmer Lehmann. And that night that Joachim saw her for the first time, he talked about some wonderful likeness. There may be no connection between the two things, but one cannot altogether help thinking that——”

“Donnerwetter, Kamerad ! Are you asleep there ?” said a rough, bass voice, in Otto’s ear.

“Not I ! I am wide awake ; only I was thinking,” answered Otto, rising, and thrusting the letter into his breast.

“Ach so !” said the soldier who had accosted him, yawning and stretching himself. “Thinking, eh ? Potztausand ! You’ll have leisure enough for thinking by-and-by, a-top of that old belfry yonder. I’ve been doing sentry duty there, and they’ve only just relieved guard. Will you come down to the Schenke, and have some Waldschlösschen ?* Not bad beer they brew, these Saxons.”

“No, thank ye, comrade.”

“Share a flask of Rhine-wine, then ? That is to say if I can find any fit to drink here !”

“Nor that either : hearty thanks all the same.”

“Well, as you will. I know if you had been perched

* Famous beer brewed near Dresden.

up among the daws there for four mortal hours in the June sunshine, you'd be ready to drink the sea dry."

"When it comes to my turn, I'm thinking that I shall rather like to be sentry up aloft on the old belfry tower."

"Shall you though? Wait till you've tried it! A man's as lonely there as though he were in a balloon. But perhaps you like solitude. I'm all for company and good-fellowship. You're a raw recruit, nicht wahr, Kamerad?" added the man, scrutinising Otto's square-built, soldierly figure.

"I'm a recruit," answered our Detmolder sturdily. "But as to being raw—— Well, I can not only stand to be shot at, but I can shoot; that's perhaps rather more than every one can say. Few men in my native place could come near me with a rifle; and it didn't take me long to learn to handle this new-fangled weapon. Deadly enough it will be too! I don't want to boast, you understand. 'Tis no special merit of mine if I can hit a mark without fail at five hundred paces. My father was a dead shot before me; and he filled the post of head-ranger to the Prince of Detmold."

"Ah, likely enough," rejoined the soldier carelessly. "If your eye-sight is so good, all the better! It will be needed to reconnoitre from the top of that owl's nest, I can tell you. And such a verteufelt winding

stair as the stupid Bauern have built, you never saw. It's as crooked as a ram's horn." The soldier strolled away towards the Schenke, and Otto looked up curiously at the belfry, whereon he would doubtless at some time have to hold his solitary watch. "A good commanding position," thought he. And then tower and sentry, and even, it must be confessed, the prospects of the great German campaign, all went out of his mind; and he thought of distant Horn, and of little Liese Lehmann in the sacristan's cottage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON THE BELFRY.

THE “raw recruit” had not long to wait for an opportunity of testing his fancy that he should like to be sentry on the lonely tower. He was told off for that duty the same night. *Midnight* sounded with a thin jangling voice from the belfry of the church at Golde-nau, as Otto Hemmerich, having toiled up the winding, narrow stone staircase, stepped out upon the roof, prepared to watch through his term of sentinel duty in the dark solitude. Under his feet was the leaden roof, weather-scarred and stained. The platform whereon he could pace was rectangular and very limited. It was bounded on the outer side by a low parapet, scarcely reaching to his knee as he stood. From the centre of the square tower sprang a tapering spire, which rose to no great height, and was surmounted by a creaking weather-cock of gilded copper. Thus, whoso ventured to climb the steep winding stair, and issue forth on to

the roof of the belfry by a low strait doorway, found himself on the narrow strip of leaden roofing which surrounded the spire. To the summit of the spire itself there was no interior way of arriving. .

One, two, three, and so on up to twelve, sounded the bell below. The bell which was the clock's voice, hung nearly ten feet lower than the summit of the tower. Its tone was, as I have said, thin and jangling ; yet more thin and jangling were the bells which chimed the quarters ;—ting tang, ting tang, ting tang, ting tang,—like the querulous voice of an old man. Thus they sounded to one listening down in the village. Heard nearer,—in the belfry itself,—they had more resonance ; and there remained, after the clappers had ceased to swing, a long quivering vibration, which seemed to quiver in the very core of the ancient stonework, and the mouldering beams, and the dry cracked tiling.

Otto stood by the parapet looking to the south-east, as the last hum of the twelfth stroke died away in his ear. The night was dark and moonless ;—too dark for it to be possible to see the landscape stretching far below. It was warm, too, as it had been all day ; although at that height, and in the near neighbourhood of the range of the Riesen-yebirge, there was not wanting a certain freshness in the air. All below

was dark and blank. Only straining his eyes as they grew used to the dimness, Otto could discern a faint, steely gleam from the river, looking as though some soldier had dropped his bright bayonet upon the peaceful meadows. Here and there a blacker spot gloomed mysteriously ; and that he knew was thick tufty woodland. Not a light shone from the village ; not a footstep sounded in its straggling streets.

Above was the midnight sky, dark and unfathomable. A few stars were scattered over its wide expanse, but these few were not brilliant. There seemed to be a veil of mist over the heavens ; and on the horizon, motionless masses of heavy cloud hung dreamlike. Otto leaned his back against the central spire for a moment, and gazed through the darkness. It seemed at first to press palpably upon his vision, as when one opens one's eyelids in water. How still and peaceful it all was ! If presently yonder bank of cloud so low in the west should be riven by the lightning of a cannonade ! How would the sleeping hamlet wake and cry aloud ! how would the bugle sound, and the drum roll ominously, and the horses' hoofs strike fiery sparks from the road-flints ! how would the bayonets clash, and the swords rattle, and the tramp of men walking steadily and in order, to meet their fate, sound with a dull resolute thud through the valley, and grow fainter in

the distance! "But there is no chance of that, to-night," thought Otto. "Next week, they say, we are to move onward into Bohemia, and I may smell powder after another fashion than in a battue in the Detmold woods." And then he commenced to pace up and down with soldierly regularity.

One o'clock; half-past one; two. Well, it was lonely up there, after all. Far away to the northward, a dog began to bark in some farmstead, and was answered by another yet more distant. Otto listened to their hoarse voices, and was almost sorry when they ceased. The silence seemed yet more silent than before. He thought of a certain September day, when he was a school-boy, and made holiday in the woods. He and two schoolfellows had passed the whole afternoon under the leafy arcades of the forest. And such store of woodland treasure as they returned to Horn with, had never been seen!—half-ripe nuts; a deserted bird's nest;—some curious orchids;—a load of juicy, crushed blackberries, wherewith irreparable damage was done in the way of stains; and the most delightful collection of rough sticks and dry twigs, intended for some elaborate construction which never got itself constructed!

"I suppose it was the dog's barking set me thinking of that day," said Otto. "I remember a great mastiff

at a Jäger's cottage where we asked for a drink of milk, gave us a good fright with his terrible deep voice. But he soon made friends, poor beast. I wonder how Lehmann's old Schnurr is!" "Ting tang; ting tang; ting tang;"—a quarter to three! Swoop came a sudden gust of wind, and wailed for a minute or two through the loop-holes and crannies of the spire, and the weather-cock creaked up aloft complainingly. Then the atmosphere grew dead calm. It was darker than ever. The sun would rise at about a quarter to four. Otto knew that. He knew also, that according to the saying, "it is always the darkest the hour before day." In little more than an hour would come daylight and his release together. Hark! What was that sound, rising upward from the village? That was surely the roll of a drum! A single horse clattered up the street. Then there was a bugle-call, distinctly audible in the motionless air. Lights twinkled in more than one casement. What was going on? The idea of a sudden night-attack by the enemy came into the head of the solitary sentinel watching from the tower; but after a while he dismissed it. There was no sharp crack of a rifle-volley, no crashing of a body of cavalry, no heavy artillery rumbling over the roads. Neither were any voices to be heard, such as would have arisen from the terrified villagers in such a circumstance as that

of their home being suddenly turned into a battle-ground.

Otto knelt down, and leaning his chin on the parapet, listened intently. Surely men were gathering on the open space around the tower. Yes, more and more distinctly he could hear the sound of footsteps. Then another sharp, sudden roll of drums, startling the echoes far and wide. Again a momentary silence. A loud, clear voice giving out the word of command, "Mar-r-r-ch!" the measured tramp of feet, growing fainter as it receded from the village; doors and casements closed with a rattling noise; then again profound, and, thence-forward, unbroken silence. "Strange!" thought Otto, as he rose from his knees, after some time. "They must be sending a detachment on towards the frontier. And yet we were so few here, I wonder that they thought it well to divide so small a body." As he turned to resume his march, the first streaks of dawn broke through the darkness in the east, and some birds began to stir in their nests amidst the stone-work of the steeple.

It was chill and raw up there aloft, and Otto began to sympathise with his comrade, who had gone straight-way to the Schenke, or village tavern, on being relieved from his term of solitary imprisonment as sentry on the belfry tower. "Ting tang; ting tang; ting tang; ting

tang ;”—four o’clock in the morning ! Cocks were crowing lustily down below. The swallows were all alive, and darted hither and thither through the fast brightening sky. The chattering of garrulous daws grew more and more voluble, as they flew with busy, flapping wing in and out of their haunts on the spire.

Silver-grey ; rose colour ; glowing purple and crimson ; bright, gorgeous, dazzling gold ! There was the sun at last, burnishing the old copper weather-cock into temporary brilliancy, and making the river,—steely pale erewhile,—flash and flow like molten silver. Why in Heaven’s name,—or in some other name less speakable,—did they not come to relieve guard ? There was Otto, however, and there it behoved him to remain. His duty was clear ; and from a duty that was clear, he had never flinched. It might be that he should judge amiss what was his duty ; it might easily be that passion, or prejudice, or the strain of family obstinacy which he shared with his uncle, the sacristan, should make him fail to see the right course to take occasionally ; but in circumstances where obedience was clearly a duty, and the precision of a military command left no doubt as to the nature of the obedience required, Otto Hemmerich might safely be trusted to hold to the right with unconquerable tenacity.

It was full, broad day. The old clock reported the

hour to be half-past six. The good people of Goldenau were stirring about their daily employments. A great portion of the highway to the village could be seen from the belfry. Here and there its dusty line disappeared, winding between rocks or skirting some swelling hill, crowned by an ancient Schloss, bosomed amid trees. But on as much of the road as could be seen, broad-wheeled Saxon carts were to be discerned moving heavily and steadily along, piled with fresh hay or other country produce. The mowers were a-field, cottagers were working in their little gardens, cattle and sheep destined for the Prussian commissariat were being driven on towards Goldenau ; but neither in the near streets and lanes, nor on the distant road, could Otto discern a glimpse of a soldier's uniform. Not a dark blue coat was to be seen anywhere. What did it mean ? What could have become of all his comrades ?

On the other hand, there was an unusual gathering of the burghers on the Platz around the tower. Otto's keen eyes could plainly see the gestures and the expression of their faces, and he observed that he himself was obviously the subject of some discussion among them ; for every now and then an old, stout, stolid-looking man, whom he recognised as the Burgomaster of the place, raised his arm and pointed upward to where the

Prussian sentry's form was sharply relieved against the sky on the summit of the belfry tower. A faint suspicion of the truth began to dawn in Otto's mind. He examined his cartridge-box, and made sure that his Zündnadel-gewehr was in good working order. Then he stood quite still, waiting for what should come next.

What did come next was that the Burgomaster advanced singly from the little crowd of men, on whose skirts a number of women and children were by this time hovering, and putting his hollowed hands to his mouth, bellowed out a long speech, addressed to Otto upon the tower. The long speech had the effect of making the stout Burgomaster very red in the face, and of exciting very evident approbation amongst his fellow-Goldenauers; but, farther than that, it produced no result whatever. For partly the greatness of the distance, and partly the South German accent, still strange in Otto's ears, and partly the fact that the Burgomaster appeared to be under the impression that if he did but bawl out the vowels loud and long enough, the consonants were of no importance to his speech, rendered what he said unintelligible to the person addressed.

Otto shook his head and touched his ears, to signify that he could not hear, and then stood still again. Upon this, the Burgomaster, after giving an angry

shrug at the deplorable waste of his eloquence, beckoned, and waved his arms with an imperious gesture of command, importing that the sentry was at once to descend from the altitude of the tower, and appear in his, the great man's, presence on *terra firma*. To this Otto vouchsafed no kind of reply, but shouldered his rifle, and coolly resumed his march up and down on the leaden roof. Coolly in appearance, that is to say; for, as may be imagined, his position was not a pleasant one, and he had shrewd misgivings that it would rapidly become decidedly unpleasant. Two things were clear to him. Firstly, that the detachment of Prussians had left Goldenau; and, secondly, that the inhabitants of the place did not expect them to return. Otherwise, the Burgomaster's swelling port would undoubtedly have been modified. How or why his comrades had gone; whether they had remembered the sentinel on the belfry, and purposely left him there, intending to return; or whether, in the hurry of a night alarm, they had forgotten his existence, and were now in the thick of some hot skirmish with the foe, he could not tell. It might be that a detachment of Austrians had made a dash northward and westward from Benedek's headquarters at Pardubitz, and that the small number of troops in Goldenau had been sent for to reinforce some threatened outpost. In brief, there was a wide field for

conjecture, both as to the fate of his comrades and the intentions of the Goldenauers towards himself. It was well that his course appeared clear in the matter, and that he needed no long time to decide upon what he would do, for this is what happened as soon as the Burgomaster and the assembled crowd on the Platz clearly perceived, by the sentry's resumption of his march up and down, that he intended to pay no attention to their summons. First the great man drew back a little from the foot of the tower, and there gathered around him a group of the chief inhabitants of the place,—the miller, the innkeeper, the principal farmer, the owner of a linen factory in the neighbourhood, and so on,—who forthwith entered into an animated discussion, as far as could be gathered by their gestures. Then the Burgomaster, being apparently urged into the van by those behind him, advanced with stately, although rather slow, footsteps to the postern-door which gave access to the winding staircase of the tower. Otto peeped over his parapet, and saw the Burgomaster enter, followed by four or five other men. The rest remained on the Platz, where their numbers were momently increased by fresh arrivals,—mowers, scythe in hand; haymakers, with their rakes; carters; cattle-drivers, armed with long, formidable-looking whips and goads; and a miscellaneous army of old persons,



women, and children, who all gazed up at the "Preusse" with strong interest and curiosity.

Otto was quite uncertain what would be the nature of the colloquy he was now to hold with the authorities of Goldenau, but he opined that it would probably not be a pacific one. Strict orders had been given to the invading troops on entering Saxony to respect the property and persons of the inhabitants, and these orders Otto was as little likely as any man in the Prussian ranks to disobey. But he would defend himself to the uttermost, and had no more idea of abandoning his post on the belfry without due authority from his superiors than a captain has of deserting the deck of his vessel. So he fixed his bayonet firmly, looked to the priming of his piece, and set himself with his back to the steeple, and exactly facing the low doorway which gave access to the roof of the tower.

"There's no hurry," he told himself, "for the Burgomaster is in the van, and it will take him some time to climb all those steps, even if he does not stick by the way in the narrow staircase." In a few minutes he could hear the panting and puffing of the stout Burgomaster, and the sound of his footsteps scraping heavy and springless on the stone steps. Quick as lightning Otto sprang to the doorway, pulled open the heavy oaken door, which opened outward, and remained

with fixed bayonet directed towards the winding staircase.

“Yield, Prussian,” cried the Burgomaster huskily. He was not yet in sight, being hidden by a turn of the stairs.

“Who goes there?” answered Otto. “Speak, or I fire!”

“In Gottes Namen, don’t fire! don’t fire!” There was a hustling noise on the steps, and a thud as of some heavy body coming violently in contact with the wall.

“Potztausend!” exclaimed the voice of one in acute pain. “You have crushed my foot, Herr Bürgermeister! Let me go on if you’re afraid. I’ll tackle him!” Thereupon the head and shoulders of the miller of Goldenau appeared in the open doorway.

“Go back there, unless you want my bayonet in your body! Back, I say!” Otto made so threatening and resolute an advance, that the miller withdrew in his turn, though much less precipitately than his predecessor, and remained on a lower step, so that his flour-dusted head alone was visible from the door on the roof.

“Come, sentry,” said the miller, “don’t be a fool! We have something to say to you. You can’t refuse to listen.”

“I don’t know that. You have no business to talk

to a sentry on guard. And for that matter, you have no business here at all."

"Perhaps you are not aware of one circumstance," said the miller, with something like a sneer; "namely, that your friends have abandoned you here altogether. The Prussians are off southward. The detachment that was here has joined the outpost at Zischen, and they're all on the march into Bohemia together, where, I fancy," he added, "Benedek will give them a warm reception."

"Enough talk! I have nothing to say to you."

"Indeed! But I have something to say to you. You are our prisoner."

"Pooh!"

The Burgomaster's voice was heard from the lower steps, coming muffled by the thick wall. "Hulloa, there! Is that Prussian rascal to keep us here all day? Why don't you bring him down?"

"He won't come."

"Won't come? Nonsense! Drag him down!"

"Would you like to try it, Herr Bürgermeister?"

"The first man who advances within three steps of the doorway I will send my bayonet into," said Otto.

The miller redescended to his friends. The position was rather difficult. The staircase wound like a cork-

screw, and was very narrow withal ; so that it was impossible to advance up it otherwise than in single file. Now although en masse the Goldenauers were exceedingly anxious to perform the glorious exploit of taking a prisoner of war, no man was to be found willing to risk his individual life in the attempt. "It would be useless for a broad-built man like myself, to venture up into the clutches of the verruchter Kerl," said the Burgomaster, looking wistfully at the spare figure of a man in the rear. "But if any light, slim, agile person were to make one spring,—one sudden spring,—so as to take the 'Preusse' off his guard, I have no doubt the fellow would be captured easily,—quite easily."

There was a dead pause. All at once the tavern-keeper made a brilliant suggestion. Why should they not reduce the enemy by famine? If he could be brought down by no other means, they had but to leave him for a short time without meat or drink, and he would be starved into submission. The idea was received with enthusiasm by all save the Burgomaster, who having firmly established the position that it was out of the question for him to be the man to do it, was extremely anxious that a dashing capture should be made, which might cover Goldenau with glory. However, it was resolved that the contumacious sentry

should be informed that he would remain aloft there without a bit or drop until such time as he chose to submit himself to the civic authorities, and deliver up his needle-gun into their hands. The miller again volunteered to be the spokesman, and cautiously climbed up the stairs to within the distance the "Preusse" had prescribed, namely, three steps below the doorway.

Otto listened with grave and silent attention to the decision of the council of war. Then, after a short pause of deliberation, he made answer thus;—"I'm right sorry to find the Goldenauers showing such a bad spirit, and being so blind to which is the good side for the cause of Fatherland. Also I think it my duty to warn you that this trick of yours may have unpleasant consequences to yourselves when my comrades come to relieve me;—as of course they will. For you are much mistaken if you suppose that a Prussian commander means to abandon one of the king's soldiers in that fashion." Though he spoke thus stoutly, Otto was far from being so assured on the subject as he seemed, feeling a considerable misgiving that he had been altogether forgotten. "But as to your threat of starving me out, that's all nonsense. I have a good supply of cartridges; I am a good shot; this tower commands the Platz and all the little lanes leading to it; and unless I am fed,—and well fed,—I swear to you

solemnly that I will pick off every human being who approaches within a hundred yards of the well yonder to draw water. Bitte, deliver that message as my answer to the Burgomaster, and try to persuade him that I mean what I say."

How can I describe the ludicrously chapfallen aspect of the miller of Goldenau as he listened to these bold, resolute words? How picture the dismay of the others when he made it clear to their minds that the devilish cunning of the detested "Preusse" had baffled their plans? How convey an idea of the bitterness of spirit wherein they finally resolved to send three daily meals to the voracious enemy, hovering, as the Burgomaster finely put it, like a bird of rapine above the heads of the community? With what words can I paint the virulence of the contest which immediately arose as to who was to pay for feeding him? Nay; these things must be left to the imagination of the reader.

But one fact I have to chronicle. When the quality, quantity, and price of the sentry's meals had been settled,—the deliberations being hastened by the shrill importunities of all the women in Goldenau, who had somehow got wind of the matter, and who would rather, so they said, feed twenty Prussians than expose the lives of their husbands and children, not to mention their own,—there remained to decide who should carry

them to him. Then upspoke a little brown-faced, flaxen-haired orphan boy of ten years old.

"Let me go! I know yon 'Preusse.' I put flowers in his gun yesterday. He swore at us; but he was right friendly. Let me go! I want to see the top of the tower. Fritz says there are daws' nests there." So little Augustin was deputed to carry the food, and I have reason to know that he was permitted to inspect the daws' nests.*

* The foregoing incident really occurred in the German war of 1866.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MAJOR'S PERPLEXITIES.

THE Land-steward Von Groll had, as Liese wrote to her lover, paid a visit to Lehmann's farm, and had learned from the farmer the story,—as far as the latter was acquainted with it,—of Liese's ill-fated mother. Averse as Franz Lehmann usually was to speaking on the subject, the Major had convinced him that his inquiries were dictated solely by a desire to do right and justice. And Franz had confided to him what all the Justizrath's cunning had failed to extract.

The circumstances which had led the farmer to adopt Lieschen were soon explained. "My poor cousin had disappeared from our knowledge for many a long day," said Franz, winding up a long-winded, rambling recital, which the Major had listened to with imperturbable, mild patience. "Her poor old mother was dead, and the few friends she had had were beginning to forget all about the most beautiful, winning, sweet-tempered



maiden that ever drew breath in the Principality, when one day I got a letter from Hanover. The letter was written by a stranger to me, and it said that a woman was lodging in the writer's house who was very ill,—dying they supposed. She had not been able to pay rent for a long, long time, but they had not turned her out of doors, she being a gentle creature, and industrious when she could get work to do, and had strength to do it. Now finding her grown so weak, the people of the house had urged her to name some relation or friend whom they could apply to on her behalf. She cried and sobbed, and said there was no one left who would care for her, and it would be best for every one when she was dead and gone. But then they had bade her think of her little helpless child, and told her plainly that they believed she had no time to lose in finding some care and shelter for the little one. They were poor folks themselves, with a large family, and could not keep her. Then my cousin had named my name, and said she believed I would accept the trust, and that if she could know that her child was in my care, she should die easier in her mind. Well, you may be sure I lost no time in setting off for Hanover when I got the letter. But it was winter time, and the roads were bad, and the rough weather that made me travel slowly, made death travel the quicker, and,—it

was all over when I got there. I found Lieschen, a fair, frightened-looking, brown-eyed mite of a child, sitting beside the poor bed in a garret in the roof of one of them tall old gable-ended houses in Hanover that you likely have seen, gnädiger Herr. She had her tiny hand clasped round her mother's dead hand ; and which was the coldest of the two, I'll swear you couldn't have told. For there was neither stove nor fuel in the place, and that with six inches of snow on the ground, and the wind cutting like a scythe ! The woman of the house had wrapped a big shawl around the child, but the little one had refused to move from her mother's side. As long as they let her sit there, she was quiet and mute, but when they tried to take her away, she wailed and screamed so, that for peace and quietness-sake and to save themselves trouble, they left the babe freezing there in the garret. She looked like a little snow image, for all the world, when I went in and found her there.

“There was scarce anything left to judge by, of my poor cousin's history all the time between her leaving home and her death. But I knew enough to know that there could be little comfort in knowing more. It's true that her old mother to the last persisted in it that the poor lass was married. But, ach Gott, gnädiger Herr ! you and I know the world better.

She had been the victim of one of them selfish villains that are enough to make a man——! Well, there's no use in talking of it! And he had left her to die in that way. She had parted with nearly all her clothing, the Hanover people told me. Ach! and if you had but seen her in her happy days! She was just like a June rose fresh blown, that's what she was. So bright-tempered, too, and gay, and cheerful! Little Liese,—God bless her!—is a sweet, pretty, gentle maiden, but she hasn't the bloom of beauty that used to make her poor mother a joy for the eyes to rest upon. And yet she's wondrous like her mother, too. I often think that those hours the little one passed in the cold garret with her mother's dead icy hand in hers, have put a mark on her somehow for life. Like as though,—if you can fancy such a thing,—a little pink rosebud had been taken and clutched by a cruel spring frost, that didn't kill it, but just froze all the colour out of it, and left it as white as a lily for evermore. Mayhap, too, the mother's sorrows helped to sadden the babe, and make her timid and still. Ach, gnädiger Herr, 'twas a bad, bad man who could have the heart to do all that evil, and leave the weak girl to bear the brunt!"

"It was a bad, bad man who could do so," assented the Major solemnly. "And you never knew his name?"

“I knew the name he went by when he enticed the luckless lass away, but folks said it was not his own. He called himself Herr Ernst,—Ludwig Ernst. I was told he was a nobleman, and that such great folks often enough go about the world under a false name. It seems a strange custom to me. Not but what I understand very well that they may sometimes have good reason for being ashamed of their own names,—no offence, gnädiger Herr.”

“Tell me, friend, your cousin's religion,—what was it?”

“Why,” answered Franz, a good deal surprised by the question, “she was brought up a Roman Catholic. Her father had been one before her. And when trouble came, there were some who held to it that the girl went wrong because of not being taught the Reformed Faith. But, Lord, Herr Major, I don't think it! Time enough to crow over our neighbours when we Lutherans have quite left off doing evil ourselves. And that's the answer I always make to such uncharitable sour-minded talk.” Then little Lieschen had arrived from the sacristan's cottage, and the Major had seen her, and had ridden away from the farm with a very grave downcast face.

He rode on for several miles still very grave and very downcast. Not only had the pitiful story which

the farmer had told him touched his heart,—not an untender heart, for all its leathern exterior,—but it had perplexed his brain. The Fates were treating the poor Major hardly. To some men,—to the Justizrath, for example,—the unravelling of such a tangled story would have been positively enjoyable. But, as has been said, to Major von Groll thinking was a distasteful process. He did not like it, and it wearied him exceedingly. The hochwohlgeborne gentleman was greatly shocked at the idea that his wife's brother could have been guilty of such cold-blooded baseness as the abandonment to want and misery of the girl who had loved and trusted him. For it was almost impossible to doubt that Liese Lehmann was the daughter of the original of that portrait which he, the Major, had found so carefully treasured in the baron's ebony cabinet. Her resemblance to the picture was marvellous. The Major had not shown it to Franz Lehmann.

The farmer would doubtless have recognised his beautiful cousin, but how was the Major to account to him for the possession of the portrait? It would have been highly disagreeable to have to relate the story of that strange death-bed in Bohemia, and still more painful to end the narration by confessing that the “selfish villain,” the mention of whom even after all these years brought a fierce angry light into Franz's

blue eyes, was no other than the noble wealthy Baron Dornberg, brother to the equally noble high-born Dame von Groll. And yet if honour and duty required it, Ferdinand von Groll was quite ready to make such a confession. “Noblesse oblige” was no empty flourish to the Major. He believed it.

This interview with Franz Lehmann had taken place about the 12th of June, although the news of it did not reach Otto until the 25th. Some days following it the Justizrath appeared at Major von Groll's with various eloquent reasons in his mouth why, if the Major really intended to set off for Saxony, it would be well that he should lose no more time before his departure. Only the Justizrath feared it would be necessary for the Major to send in his formal resignation of the post of land-steward to the Prince of Detmold before setting off for the Dornberg estates. The Justizrath “feared” this, because such a step would seem so like losing his good friend for ever. And the Prince, too! — the Justizrath so entirely sympathised with the chagrin the Prince would feel when it was made known to him that Major von Groll would cease to be numbered amongst his Highness's most able and most devoted officials! Still painful as it was to Von Schleppers to contemplate the impending separation from his friend, the gist of the Justiz-

rath's remarks was that the sooner Von Groll went, the better.

" Well, I will see about it. If nothing unforeseen happens, I will write the resignation next week," said the Major. But more than this the gnädige Frau his wife could not induce him to promise.

" I declare I long to be out of the place, Ferdinand," said that lady.

" Well, I don't know, Amalia," responded her husband: " there are worse places to live in than little Detmold. For my own part I shall miss the grand woods and the hunting a good deal. And I thought you liked the place, too, my dear. The people have been kind to us here."

" Kind? Nonsense! It has been all very well; but of course one doesn't care for this sort of thing when one can get anything better. Our position in future will be quite different, as befits our birth. And so why on earth should we regret leaving Detmold?"

The Major had said no word to the Justizrath,—had said no word even to the wife of his bosom,—respecting the information he had received from Franz Lehmann. The Justizrath, he felt, would have received it with a mild, " I told you so!" having from the first impressed upon the Major that the portrait in the ebony cabinet was indubitably a relic of some youthful

love-affair,—one doubtless of many similar episodes in the career of the gay Baron Ernest Dornberg, and that it deserved no peculiar attention; still less that Major von Groll should give himself any concern about a matter which had been past and gone so many years, and in which he had no responsibility whatever.

Amalia would have given utterance to a violent, virtuous tirade against "that creature," and would in all probability have extended her chaste wrath and indignation to the innocent Lieschen. And the Major had every desire to shield the orphan girl from being the subject of scandalous gossip. "Amalia's notions are so very strict," reflected the Major. And he had an instinctive conviction that the "strictness" of his Amalia's notions would lead her to disapprove much more violently of her brother's victims than of her brother himself. So Major von Groll held his tongue. Nevertheless he was not satisfied. If his intellect were obtuse, his conscience was sensitive; and his conscience did not allow him to rest altogether at ease. He read, and re-read the statement of the Reverend Nepomuk Souka, and cudgelled his brains for a theory which should reconcile Ernest's dying words with such facts as he had learned from Farmer Lehmann.

In brief, the poor gentleman was worrying himself into a state of nervous anxiety, which threatened to

undermine his health. And, I repeat, the Fates seemed to be using him hardly in throwing such a burden upon his powers of mind. Something he felt was wrong,—but what? Had Major von Groll been as well acquainted with Shakspeare as was the leonine Professor, he might have exclaimed with Hamlet,

“The time is out of joint;—O cursed spite!
That ever I was born to put it right.”

But Major von Groll knew nothing about Shakspeare. His only recreation was to take long rides through the woodlands. And even this pleasure was tinged by the melancholy with which people view any agreeable haunt that they are shortly to bid a long farewell to.

As soon as he had given that conditional promise to his wife and the Justizrath touching his resignation, the Major went down to the Marstall,—the fine and renowned stables belonging to the Prince of Detmold, and attached to the Schloss,—and ordered a horse to be saddled for his afternoon ride. At the Marstall he found old Albrecht, who had a son employed as groom there, and the sight of the Jäger reminded the Major of their expedition to the deserted hunting-lodge on the Grotenberg. “Ha, Albrecht,” he said, in answer to the old man’s respectful greeting, “how goes it? Tell them to saddle black Ali for you, and come along with me. I want to say a few words to you. I will

ride on slowly towards the Grotenberg woods, and you will soon overtake me."

As soon as the land-steward and his attendant were clear of the town and of the scattered villas of the suburb by the Banks of the Werre, Von Groll beckoned the Jäger to come up to him, and bade him ride by his side.

"Do you know where we are going, Albrecht?"

"No; but wherever the gnädiger Herr commands, I will follow."

"Don't you know where we are going, Albrecht?"

"Umph! I misdoubt me."

"To the deserted hunting-lodge, man."

"Ja so!"

"You have said nothing to any one about our former expedition?"

"The Herr Major had my promise."

"Ganz gut! Now tell me if anything has happened up there during my absence. I have had so many other things in my head lately, that I had nearly forgotten my adventure there."

It appeared that Albrecht had little to tell about the hunting-lodge. The stories of its being haunted had not died away certainly. No, they had increased, on the contrary. No Jäger would willingly go near the place after dusk. And in truth it was not a favourite

resort at any hour. It was clear that Albrecht himself by no means relished the prospect of a visit there. Had he forgotten how positively they had satisfied themselves that human agency had opened the shutters, and that some human being had made himself a bed of leaves in the upper chamber? No, he had not forgotten, —not in the least. Neither had he forgotten the terrible sable, fiery-eyed visage which had glared out upon him from the bushes as they were returning to Detmold. Ach Himmel! These things were better let alone. Nevertheless if the Herr Land-steward commanded he would obey. Old Albrecht was not one to go back from his word.

They reached the lodge while it was yet early in the afternoon, and entered it without difficulty by way of the back window as on the former occasion. All was still, and, save that summer warmth had replaced the cold March winds, very much as it had been on their first visit. On the hearthstone they perceived a fresh pile of wood ashes, giving token that a goodly fire had blazed there since they had seen it last. In the upper chamber some straw covered with a canvas sack had replaced the bed of leaves. Another innovation was a stone pitcher full of water, that stood beside the rude couch.

“Bei meiner Ehre!” exclaimed the Major, contem-

plating these things with a grave countenance, "the rascal is making himself at home! You see the old house is evidently still his head-quarters. Now it is surprising,—certainly very surprising,—that so clever and energetic a man as the Justizrath von Schleppers should have allowed this sort of thing to go on under his nose without discovering——."

"Look here, gnädiger Herr," cried Albrecht, advancing from a corner of the room where he had been prosecuting some researches in a small bundle that lay on the floor there, "only see this! I have found a knife with a buck-horn handle, and whose name do you think is engraved on the little plate of metal let into it? Otto Hemmerich. There it is, O-t-t-o,—Otto Hemmerich as large as life!" After a short discussion between the Major and his follower, they left the lodge, turned their horses' heads towards the foot of the hill; down a steeper and less-frequented path than the one they had come by, and within half-an-hour were galloping at a good pace along the high road that led to Horn.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A GLIMPSE OF THE TRUTH.

Two horsemen, mounted on fine steeds from the Marstall, clattering into Horn, and drawing bridle before the door of the Pied Lamb, caused unwonted excitement, not only in the hostelry, but throughout the whole length of the street. The blacksmith peered out from his cavernous forge. The blacksmith's poodle being less tied to the spot by the necessities of business than his master, walked across the road to the Pied Lamb, and examined the strangers curiously. Granny Becker lifted her trembling head from her knitting, and stared at them. The horse-faced man at the general shop leant over his half-door to see; and Herr Peters interrupted the pounding of some drugs, and paused, pestle in hand, to blink through his spectacles at the land-steward, whom he knew by sight. Out came the waiter, hurrying and eager; out came the stout waiting-maid; out came Herr Quendel himself,

and with many solemn bows ushered the illustrious guest into his house, and demanded what he could have the honour of preparing for his refreshment. But there was considerable disappointment in the Pied Lamb when Major von Groll, having desired that the horses should be cared for, and ordered a draught of beer for Albrecht after his hot ride, declined taking any food himself, but asked the way to the house of the sacristan of St. Mary's, and having been told it, set off thither on foot, followed by the Jäger.

What on earth could take the land-steward to Simon Schnarcher's cottage, was an enigma which occupied the mental ingenuity of a large number of the population of Horn during several hours. The reader, however, may know that that which caused Major von Groll to visit the sacristan's house was the buck-horn handled knife whereon was cut the name of Otto Hemmerich.

Old Simon could give no account of it. The knife was his nephew's, he believed. But how it had come to be found in the hunting-lodge he was unable to guess. His nephew and he were at variance. The young man had disobeyed him, and had gone his own way. He, Simon Schnarcher, could not answer for what haunts he had frequented or what acquaintances he had made. Really it was a matter with which he could not concern

himself. But even as the old man spoke the harsh words in his harshest tones, there was a tear trembling in the corner of his eye ; and he stooped down again over a garden bed that he was weeding, to hide his emotion. The Major had found Simon in his garden, basking in the hot sunshine, and trimming or weeding a little here and there, with the notion that he was at work.

“Mayhap,” suggested old Sophie, “ ‘twas an old knife left there from the head-ranger’s time.” But this was proved to be out of the question. Not only was the knife bright and free from rust, but it had not been there three months ago, on the occasion of the Major’s first visit.

“ My opinion is,” said Albrecht, gloomily, “ that the lad was robbed and,—who knows?—perhaps murdered in that cursed den. Why, he has disappeared from Detmold like a shooting star from a summer sky! Who knows where Otto Hemmerich may be at this moment?” That knew little Lieschen, tripping up the garden path in time to hear the query, put in Albrecht’s deepest and most lugubrious tones. At least she knew where he had been but a short time ago. And she, too, it was who could read the riddle of the knife having been found in the hunting-lodge. Why, Otto had slept there the night before he went away!

To be sure he had ! And most likely he had given the clasp-knife as a keepsake to his cousin, the charcoal-burner, who lived there.

“ Oh, indeed ! ” said the Major, more absently than was his wont; for he was gazing at Lieschen and thinking of the portrait and of all the circumstances connected with his possession of it. “ Lives there, does he ? ”

Well, yes ; or if he did not exactly live there always, he slept there very often. Otto had told her about it. And then little Lieschen blushed, and looked very shy and timid.

“ Do you hear, gnädiger Herr Major ? ” whispered Albrecht aside to his master. “ This is the fellow we have been seeking for, depend on it.” But though he whispered, Lieschen heard him, and pricked up her ears, fearing to have done wrong in speaking.

“ Oh, Eure Gnaden ! ” she cried, clasping her little hands, and trembling very much as she looked into the Major’s face, “ indeed he is an honest man, though very poor. I hope you have nothing against him ! ” Then she turned to the sacristan, who was affecting not to listen, and leaning down to his ear, as he stooped over the garden-bed, said softly, “ He is Otto’s cousin, Herr Küster.”

The upshot of the matter was, that the Major having

expressed a desire to see and speak with this lonely occupant of the hunting-lodge, Lieschen undertook to make him come forward, having first received the Major's assurance that no harm should be done to the man if he could prove himself to have been guilty of no greater crime than surreptitiously taking shelter in an empty house. She knew, or believed that the land-steward could find Joachim, and force him to appear, if he thought fit to do so; for in Lieschen's eyes the land-steward was a mighty, powerful, and,—save, perhaps, to the Prince himself,—irresponsible potentate. But she wanted Otto's cousin to come forward like an honest man, and give an account of himself freely, without waiting to have it dragged from him.

“Joachim is generally at work in the woods about Horn on a Friday,” said she, with a bashful earnestness that was very pretty to behold; “and to-morrow is Friday, and, if you will, I can go up to the wood above Cousin Franz's hill-side meadows to-morrow morning and get him to come and speak with Eure Gnaden.” And so it was settled it should be. The Major would remain at the Pied Lamb that night, despatching a messenger to Detmold, to set *Frau von Groll*'s mind at rest as to his safety; and the next morning he would meet this Joachim at the sacristan's cottage, if the sacristan would permit.

Pride of birth, which showed itself in Amalia in the shape of callous indifference to the feelings of inferiors, resulted in her husband's case, in a certain stiff, grave, condescending politeness. It was incumbent on a gentleman to be civil and considerate to those unfortunates to whom Providence had not vouchsafed sixteen quarterings. Just in the same way, although in a greater degree, the Major would have been shocked and disgusted at cruelty to a horse or a dog. Since God Almighty had made him so superior to these dumb beasts by the fact of creating him human, all manhood and religion and self-respect prompted him to use them with gentleness. Ferdinand von Groll would, in fact, have been a soft-mannered man, but for the professional habit of command, which tempered his mildness with a touch of military brevity and decision. "Well, Albrecht," said he, as he walked back to the Pied Lamb, accompanied by the old Jäger, "you see what nonsense all these foolish huntsmen and country folks got into their heads about the lodge being haunted. After all, it turns out to be a poor devil who did not know where else to lay his head. And mark what mischief such superstitions do. Had the fellow been a robber,—a second Schinderhannes,—all those wild stories would only have served to help him and screen him from detection."

“ Umph !” said Albrecht, gruffly enough.

Perhaps,—for flesh is weak,—the Major was led to improve the occasion for Albrecht’s behoof more than he otherwise would have done, by an unacknowledged sense of disappointment at the bottom of his heart, at finding his own theories and expectations blown to the winds. He would have liked vastly to astonish the Justizrath von Schleppers by the discovery of a nest of outlaws in the very midst of the Grotenberg forest. Even a poacher would have been something. But a houseless vagabond of a charcoal-burner, as harmless as a rabbit,—pooh ! it was very tame. The Major proceeded with his lecture. “ Now observe, Albrecht, how fancy misleads people. The man is a charcoal-burner. It was his black face, no doubt, which you saw peeping out of the bushes, and you forthwith declare that you have seen the Wild Huntsman !”

“ I should like to dust the carle’s grimy jacket with my hunting-whip,” responded Albrecht, frowning angrily. Then, after a second or two, he added, with a dogged obstinacy of conviction which was obviously unassailable, “ But as to the Black Huntsman, gnädiger Herr,—Lord protect us and forgive us our sins!—there’s no manner of doubt about him. My grandfather saw him with his own eyes. And he has always

haunted the Detmold woods,—always! since as long ago as they was woods, and longer.”

That evening, in the Spiese-Saal of the Pied Lamb, both Albrecht, the Prince’s Jäger, and Simon Schnarcher, the sacristan, were the objects of extreme curiosity, and not a little respectful attention from the assembled company. The Major dined in a private room, and the field was therefore clear for his subordinate to satisfy all inquiries, either outspoken or merely hinted, as to the cause of the great man’s visit to Horn. But the Jäger was as dumb as a fish, and silently imbibed prodigious quantities of beer. As to the sacristan, he was, they knew, a very unpromising person from whom to extract information that he was not wholly minded to give. On this special evening he was unwontedly taciturn.

The only man who appeared to be thoroughly enjoying himself was Herr Quendel. The reader has already been made acquainted with that worthy’s peculiar theories on the subject of good-fellowship, and how little he considered conversation had to do with the pleasures of society. The unusual silence, therefore, as it did not diminish the consumption of beer and tobacco, cast no cloud upon his broad visage. And as he sat there, resting his ponderous form in a comfortable arm-chair, smoking a weedy cigar, surrounded by

his old customers, and knowing that the Land-steward von Groll,—the very deputy and representative as it were of his gracious Highness himself,—was finishing his supper in the adjoining room, Herr Quendel considered himself, and no doubt justly, to be as thriving and contented a landlord as any in Detmold.

The next morning Liese, as she had expected, found Joachim Müller at his occupation about half a mile within the woods above Lehmann's farm. At first he was very averse to being taken into any house, and, above all, to seeing the Prince's land-steward. "What good can it do?" said he. "See what comes of it when I try to speak to any of the folks. They don't believe me, and drive me away for a thief and a vagabond, like the farmer's wife yonder. I had better have held my tongue than greeted Otto Hemmerich that first day he saw me in the woodlands."

"Otto does not think so," replied Lieschen, coaxingly. "Won't you come and talk to the gnädiger Herr and let him see that you are an honest man, if you be poor, and that you have no need to skulk away from any of them? You live too solitary, and get fancies, Joachim. Come, for Otto's sake,—for my sake!" Heaven knows whither he would not have followed that face and that voice. He came after her down the shady pathway, keeping ever a few paces

behind, and at intervals she would turn her head to smile at and encourage him ; and so they reached the sacristan's cottage.

“ It is true what I guessed,” cried Lieschen eagerly, as she threw open the garden-gate, and advanced to where the sacristan was standing, rake in hand. “ It is true. Otto gave him the clasp-knife for a keepsake. He says so.”

How had things changed when Lieschen dared to go up to the old man and speak that name, looking full into his face ! Yet no storm followed. Simon cast one rapid, keen glance at the wild-looking apparition who stood hesitating at his gate. Then he said drily, but not unkindly ;—“ Thou art a foolish little maid, I doubt me, to believe a thing is so, just because he,—or, for that matter, any other man,—says it is so. Get thee into the house, where yonder soldier-steward is waiting already. He has not much gumption, hasn't the soldier ;—isn't so wise as he looks, little maid. But, withal, I should judge him to be a right-thinking man.”

“ So ! ” said the Major, abruptly, when the charcoal-burner was ushered into the sacristan's stone-paved kitchen ; “ you are the fellow who has been frightening all my Jägers, eh ? They took you for the Black Huntsman ! ”



“Nay,” answered Joachim, with a dazed, bewildered gaze, “I cannot say what they took me for. I meant no evil.”

“As to frightening,” muttered Albrecht, bolt upright behind his master’s chair; “such as him don’t frighten Detmold Jägers. Not by fair means, that is, any way.”

“Be still, Albrecht!” said the Major curtly. Then he asked, “Why did you go to the hunting-lodge?”

“For shelter.”

“Nothing else?”

“Nothing else. As you can see, there is nothing for any one to steal, and I did no damage to the Prince’s property.”

“Maybe not; but it was all contrary to discipline. How long have you been in the habit of sleeping in the lodge?”

“Ever since the beginning of last winter.”

“The devil you have!”

“I have told you that I meant no harm.”

The Major proceeded to point out that it was a suspicious-looking proceeding on the part of any person in the Prince’s employ to take up his abode clandestinely in a house supposed to be shut up and inaccessible, except by means of a key at that moment hanging in the land-steward’s office at Detmold. Joachim listened with a downcast, half-sullen air. “I think you might

pay rather more respect and attention, Blackface, when his lordship condescends to talk to you," said the old huntsman, whose wrath was hot against the haunter of the hunting-lodge.

"Be still, Albrecht! And have you no friends or relations?"

"No."

"No comrade among the other charcoal-burners who might share a hut with you?"

"No."

"I'll tell you the truth, gnädiger Herr," put in the irrepressible Albrecht. "None of the others will associate with him. They say he's been in prison somewhere or other, and call him Jail-bird. I know the fellow now. The truth will out in the long run. One tells another——. Why they do say that a Hausfrau here in Horn caught him trying to steal her ducklings, and raised a regular hue and cry after him with all her farm-servants. This is the carle, for a thousand bright thalers!"

"See, now!" cried little Lieschen, who had been present in the kitchen during the interview, fearing, as in truth was likely, that unless she remained, Joachim would not remain either. "See, now, how cruel and unjust folks are! Oh, Eure Gnaden! I know,—indeed I do,—that that story is false. It was to my cousin's

house he came, and the Hausfrau could not accuse him of stealing anything, for he never touched a thing,—and she was angry, certainly,—but there was nothing to prove he had done any harm;—and I beg your pardon, Herr Albrecht, if I have spoken amiss. I am sure you would not willingly say what was not true. But they have told you falsely; indeed they have!” And then Lieschen, amazed at her own boldness, trembled and cast down her eyes. The Jäger stared in surprise, and shrugged his shoulders. Joachim remained motionless, with his eyes fixed on her face, as though he were lost to all other outward objects. As to the Major, he was becoming quite interested. This was a winning little creature, this girl,—so shy and timid as to flush and tremble if a stranger did but look upon her, and yet with courage enough to speak up for a friend in trouble! That was a virtue which the Major was fully able to appreciate. Besides, he felt, in some half-unconscious way, that he owed this child all the kindness in his power. He had never put the matter plainly to himself, but there was in his not very clear mind a distinct sense that some reparation was due to her for wrongs suffered at the hands of one nearly connected with himself. For wronged Lieschen and Lieschen’s mother had certainly been, even judging merely by the story he had heard from Farmer Franz.

And perhaps——; but the Major did not pursue the “perhaps” any farther just then. He dismissed Albrecht back to the inn, bidding him see that the horses were saddled by twelve o’clock. Then he waved the charcoal-burner away to the farther end of the long kitchen, out of ear-shot, where Joachim sat down near the door, with his rapt gaze still fixed upon Lieschen. Finally, Major von Groll beckoned the girl to approach him, and began questioning her in an under-tone.

Why was she so interested in this man? Because he was Otto’s cousin, eh? So, then, Otto was a very dear friend of hers? Ah so, so! Where was he? Why had he left Detmold? Umph! He,—the Major,—should inquire of Lawyer von Schleppers why no word had yet reached his ears of this young man’s desire to get the Jäger’s place. But now as to this charcoal-burner;—when he hung about Farmer Lehmann’s homestead, since Lieschen protested that she was sure he did not come to steal the ducklings, what was it he had wanted?

Well, he had wanted to say something to Cousin Franz about her, Lieschen. She had not known it at the time; but the next day, when Cousin Hanne,—that was the Hausfrau, she explained,—had come back from Detmold, there had been a great quarrel and dis-

turbance ; and Cousin Hanne, who was apt to be a little cross sometimes, had declared that the charcoal-burner was a prying, insolent fellow, who had been to the Justizrath von Schleppers, to ask questions about their family affairs. And then Cousin Franz had been angry too.

“ Strange ! ” said the Major, whose brain was unable to receive so many new facts and combinations in quick succession, without some sensation of bewilderment. “ Why should a fellow like him have gone to Von Schleppers for information about Lehmann’s family ? Do you think, girl, that he is quite right in his head, this charcoal-burner ? Only see how he glares at you, like one walking in his sleep.”

“ Yes,” answered Liese simply ; “ he always looks at me like that. Otto told me that he said I was so very very like some one he knew and loved long ago.”

Amidst the floating conjectures and recollections and possibilities which had now for some time haunted the Major’s mind, these words came like something clear, something tangible, something with which to connect a solid fact that he held in his hand. He rose up and walked across the kitchen to where Joachim was sitting slouched together on his chair. Then he unbuckled the flap of a large leathern hunting pouch which hung across his shoulder by a strap, and taking out a square

case, which looked like a book, opened it, and held it before the charcoal-burner's eyes. "Did you ever see any one like that?" he said.

The man did not cry, or start, or move. He looked steadfastly at the portrait in the casket for a second or two. Then a violent trembling seized him from head to foot; he tried to gasp out the word "Barbara!" but a contraction in his throat seemed nearly to choke him. Lieschen, terrified, ran up and put her hand on his shoulder. At that touch the tears poured suddenly down his face, and sinking on his knees beside the chair, he fell to sobbing like a little child!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CHARCOAL-BURNER'S STORY.

It will be necessary to lay before the reader, in a somewhat condensed form, the statement made in the sacristan's kitchen, with much agitation, incoherence, and repetition, by Joachim Müller.

Before his interview with the charcoal-burner, Major von Groll was already convinced in his own mind that Liese was the daughter of his deceased brother-in-law by the beautiful waitress at the inn in Meinberg. But the question whether their union had been a lawful one, and the girl's birth legitimate, was still doubtful to him. It would certainly never have entered his head to conjecture that Ernest, Baron Dornberg, had condescended to such a mésalliance, but for the death-bed scene described by the priest Souka. The idea that he had so condescended was very shocking to Major von Groll. No beauty, no sweetness, no virtue on the part of the woman, could excuse so terrible a breach

of the sacred duties which a nobly-born man owes to his family and his race. But shocking as such a marriage might be, to deny and repudiate it when made was more shocking still. Could Ernest have been guilty of such baseness? The charcoal-burner's story very decisively answered that question; and, moreover,—if it was to be believed,—convicted Baron Dornberg of such an amount of additional baseness as made the Major aghast to listen to. It was briefly this.

After a year or two spent in the service of the family with whom he had left Pyrmont, Joachim went one summer with his young master, the eldest son of the house, a gay reckless spendthrift, to the baths of Meinberg. There they saw Barbara Lehmann, whose remarkable loveliness was famed throughout all the district round. Many people came to the Rose Inn, where she was waitress, merely to see her. But no tongue could say an evil word of the girl's reputation. The worst fault that ill-nature could find with her was that she valued herself too much on her good looks, and was too high and proud for one in her station. Joachim's master, Baron Ernest Dornberg, was at Meinberg incognito, and assumed merely his two Christian names, Ludwig Ernest. He speedily fell in love with the beautiful Barbara, and finding it hopeless to induce

her to listen to his suit on any other terms, made up his mind to marry her secretly.

On Joachim she appeared to have exercised unbounded and extraordinary influence. He became, in fact, desperately and hopelessly in love with her. He did not know whether she ever suspected his passion; he only knew that she was always sweet and kind to him, and that he would willingly have laid down his life to serve her.

The Baron and Barbara eloped from Meinberg, attended only by Joachim. They crossed the frontier of the Austrian empire, and were married by an old Catholic priest at an obscure village. Joachim was the only witness of the marriage. After the ceremony Baron Dornberg took his bride to an old country house in a secluded spot, which he had hired for a time. There he remained with her as long as he could, only occasionally leaving her to join his family, who were travelling in Germany from one gay capital to another. In the spring of the year 1847 Barbara gave birth to a daughter. After this event she became very anxious to have her marriage acknowledged. But her husband had always some excellent reason to allege for keeping it secret a while longer; and as she loved him devotedly, she never thought of disputing his wishes. But she grew pale, and thin, and downcast; and

Joachim fancied that she began to perceive that which his love-quicken'd observation in all that related to her had taught him for some time past,—namely, that her husband's love for her was cooling. She was a tie and a restraint upon him; and as he loved himself better than anything else in the world, that vexed him, and made him come to see her seldom, and stay but a short time when he did come. When his infant daughter was but a few months old the Baron left the secluded country house for Munich, where his mother then lived. And the visit, thus ended, proved to be the last he ever paid to his low-born bride. From this point we may pursue the story in Joachim's own words.

“ Within a very short time afterwards we servants began to hear a talk that Baron Ernest was to marry a great heiress, and that the old Baroness his mother had brought the match about. At first I just laughed at it in my sleeve, knowing, as I thought, that it was all foolish gabble. But by-and-by things began to look serious. The Baron was very smooth and civil to me when I came in his way, but he shunned me. One day I made up my mind to speak to him, and in spite of his trying to avoid me I went into his room, and told him of the rumours that I had heard. He was half frightened, half angry, but he kept himself down; and



he took a handsome gold pin, with a bright red stone in it, out of his cravat, and turned it about in his fingers whilst I was speaking to him. 'Pooh!' said he at last, looking at me in a strange way. 'You are a faithful fellow, Joachim, and you have never been sufficiently rewarded. Take this little token of my satisfaction.' I pushed the pin away from me, and said that I thanked him, but that the best reward he could give me would be to declare that the stories about his engagement to the rich lady were false. Then he changed his tone. 'Why should they be false?' 'Why?' cried I, 'because you have a true and lawful wife living at this moment, and if no one else knows it, I do.' He tried to laugh at me, and to say that the marriage with Barbara had been all a sham, and that he had supposed I had known it as well as he. If he became a wealthy man it would be the best thing that could happen for Barbara, for he would take care of her and the child, and he would behave liberally to all who had served him well. I could have strangled him then and there, the false lying villain! He saw that I looked dangerous, I suppose, for he made to the door as quick as he could. I had only just time to call to him that I would never let such a wrong be done while I had breath, before he was away down the main staircase. In a minute or two the chambermaid came to the door

of the room, looked in, saw me there, and went away again. How I felt it would be hard for me to tell you, and it wouldn't matter to any one to know it if I could. The Baron didn't leave me long to make up my mind what I would do. That afternoon I was arrested on the charge of stealing a valuable pin, the property of my master. The pin had been found hidden in the mattress of my bed.

“Well, what was the good of my denying, or protesting, or swearing that I had never touched the pin, that I had never stolen anything in my life? Do you think they believed my word against the Baron's? And if I swore, he swore. An oath was nothing to him; he had broken many. When they asked him if he could speak to my previous character, he said that I had many good qualities, and had been a favourite servant; but he was grieved to confess that he had noticed little acts of dishonesty in me before, and had hoped to cure me by kindness and forgiveness. He was as white as could be, and shook like a leaf, and he never once turned his eyes on me; and all the cute law gentlemen they praised up his feeling heart, and said how hardened I must be to rob so good a master. That was more than I could bear quietly. I broke out like a madman, and told what I knew of Baron Dornberg; and how he wanted to get me out of the way because I

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"They had a good deal of trouble with me, had my jailers. Though I don't say that they were bad people, or treated me bad. They did their duty, I suppose. But I was furious. I stormed and struggled like a madman. I was almost mad. The thought of what was in store for Barbara was always before me; and there was I, the only one that could help her, the only one that could clear her good name, shut up like a wild beast in a cage. The end of it was that I got brain-fever. That's what the doctor called it. When I began to know myself again, I was weak as a baby, and for a long time I couldn't remember clear what had

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In answer to some further inquiries, Joachim declared that on his release he had made for the old country house where Barbara had been living with her baby, but had found no trace of her. Strangers were in the place who knew nothing of its former occupants. At last he discovered an old peasant woman who remembered the beautiful young woman that had lived there so shut up and solitary. The old woman had been employed as servant about the place. The beautiful young woman had gone away all of a sudden, taking her little girl with her. The child was delicate, and the old peasant felt pretty sure that it would not live. He continued to seek the unfortunate girl as best he could,

and traced her northward into Hanover. There he found the last sad page of her history written on a tombstone in a little suburban cemetery. The inscription had been put there by honest Franz Lehmann, and consisted of the words—

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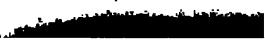
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The charcoal-burner's strange emotion at sight of a picture which Liese had not been allowed to see; the grave, solemn manner in which the land-steward had requested her to withdraw; the long colloquy that had then taken place between him and Joachim Müller; and the abrupt departure of the latter without a word of explanation,—were all discussed over and over again between the two women. Meanwhile the Major was repeating the main points of the charcoal-burner's narrative to the astonished ears of Simon Schnarcher.

The old man had been immensely flattered at first by the Major's announcement that he wished to ask his advice. Simon was by no means the man to feel any smallest misgiving as to his own perfect competence to advise on any conceivable subject; therefore he took his seat with much dignity in the great arm-chair, prepared to pour forth the treasures of his experience and wisdom for the Major's benefit, and altogether in a state of great complacency. What he heard, however, was so wonderful, so altogether strange and unexpected, and involved so many possibilities nearly affecting himself and his household, that for once the sacristan was dumbfounded. The Major, in telling the story, suppressed the name of Barbara's faithless husband,—thus keeping out of sight his own near connection with the matter,—but faithfully related all the par-

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"Yes; he has told it to me."

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Horn, and from Detmold. Ach leider ! It was a drear, lonely world for old folks.

Then deeper in his heart than all this lay a yearning pity for Otto. Otto loved the lass. It was all foolish boy-and-girl nonsense, no doubt. Still Otto fancied he loved her, anyway; and so it was real enough to him. Now, if this maiden proved to be a high-born lady, good-bye of course to all love-making between her and the sacristan's nephew. Not but that as far as he,—Simon,—could see, Otto was worth any half-dozen of your fine folks, take it which way you might. Then there were twinges of painful remembrance;—how he himself had once looked upon any connection with Lehmann's Liese, much as these great people would, he supposed, be apt to look upon a connection with Otto. “But that's different,” he told himself obstinately;—“quite, quite different.”

And then at last his dogged pride would give way for a moment, and he would cry out with the hot tears in his aged eyes,—“ Oh, my boy, my boy ! God knows if I shall ever see thee more. And if thou 'scape the murderous weapons of the fighting men, thou'l come back home to find the lass thou lovest gone and fled out of thy reach. And I drove thee away,—I that promised thy dead father to love thee as mine own ! Oh, my boy, my boy ! ”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“NOBLESSE OBLIGE.”

NEVER in the whole course of her life, which had extended now over some five-and-forty years, had Amalia Wilhelmina von Groll felt even the faintest approach to the violent emotions of anger, amazement, disappointment, and a pervading sense of utterly impotent spitefulness, which raged in her bosom when, on his return to Detmold, her husband communicated to her the intelligence that there was a living and legitimate daughter of her dead brother,—and, consequently, the rightful inheritor of all that brother’s property,—at present residing in the obscure townlet of Horn; and that he,—the Major,—had entirely satisfied himself of the justice of the said daughter’s claims, and intended to put no hindrance in the way of their legitimate satisfaction. If I were compelled to select one word which should most comprehensively express the leading traits in *Frau von Groll’s* character, I should choose

“greedy.” Frau von Groll was greedy of meat and drink; greedy of personal comfort; greedy of obedience, and deference, and consideration, from those around her; greedy, above all things, of money,—as comprising, according to the teachings of her limited intelligence, all these other good things.

In her rage, she showed her astonished husband plainly the very low position which he occupied in her estimation. Her husband was a fool! A credulous, easy, gullible fool! Oh, if she had but gone to Bohemia herself, instead of trusting to his incompetence! What! were the lying words of a Jesuitical old priest, and a conspiracy trumped up between wretched, low, cunning peasants,—creatures who could have no sense of right and wrong,—to deprive her,—her, Amalia Wilhelmina von Groll, geboren Dornberg,—of the inheritance derived from her family? There could be no law in such a decision! No law that ever was made would deprive her of her property on such absurd grounds. And as to justice—. Where was the justice of disappointing all her hopes, and robbing her of that which she had come to look upon as her own? They would see that she did not intend to submit tamely. She would dispute the cause inch by inch in every tribunal in Germany. What? It was not a question of law, but of honour? Ferdinand was con-

vinced that the girl Liese was the rightful heiress to the Dornberg estates, and therefore,—being satisfied in his own mind,—did not intend to litigate? Well! well!—even so,—even granting that Ernest had married the vile, abominable, designing hussy, and had thus for ever sullied the glory of the family 'scutcheon, why should they trouble their heads about it? Charity began at home; and people's first duty was to take care of themselves. Why could they not give the girl a few hundred thalers as a marriage dowry,—if, indeed, any such generosity were called for by the circumstances of the case, which she, for her part, could not altogether admit,—and hold their tongues about the Dornberg estate, and enjoy it quietly? This last utterance shocked and pained her husband more than anything else she had said, and he answered, with a face of intense solemnity, “But, Amalia, I fear you do not understand, that would not be honest,—not to speak of the nicety of honour which our birth and breeding demand from us!” Whereto his helpmate responded that such nicety of honour was mere “albernes Geschwätz,”—stuff and nonsense,—and that her husband might at least confine the nicety of his honour to the conduct of his own affairs, and not interfere to beggar her, and rob her of her ancestral inheritance!

The poor Major was beginning to make the discovery

that a line of conduct regulated strictly by the “nicest honour” may be applauded by many persons with enthusiasm, so long as it is confined to mere theories, or to the observance of certain social punctilios; but that it is looked upon in a very different light when it assumes the shape of opposition to material interests. No amount of scrupulousness and pride of race appeared ridiculous to Frau von Groll, so long as these qualities were exhibited in the shape of Ferdinand’s claims upon others; but it was quite another matter directly they urged him to fulfil to the uttermost the just claims of others upon him! All the painfulness of opposing his wife did not, however, for a moment shake Major von Groll in his resolution.

The lady felt that her only hope lay in the Justiz-rath von Schleppers. To him she flew in secret, immediately after her first stormy interview,—the precursor of many similar ones,—with her husband upon his return home. To her dismay, she found that wily personage by no means disposed to make himself the thorough-going partisan of her views, which she had fondly reckoned upon his proving. Puss-in-Boots was far from having any intention of risking his reputation to oblige Frau von Groll.

“I must examine the evidence, my dear madam, if the Major does me the honour to consult me legally.

And of course, on the evidence, and the evidence only, will my opinion be formed. I mentioned that to you, if you remember, at a former interview."

"I remember very well what passed at that interview, Herr Justizrath," said the lady, boiling with indignation, "quite as well as you do. And, let me tell you, you may chance to find my memory as good as yours on more points than one." Upon which Frau von Groll had flounced out of the Justizrath's office, leaving the lawyer in a state of mind which could not be said to be altogether comfortable. But the Major did not ask for Lawyer von Schleppers' professional opinion. He merely informed him, in a curt and rather cool manner, that circumstances had arisen which made it desirable for him to remain a while longer in Detmold, and that, consequently, the writing of his resignation of the land-stewardship would now be indefinitely postponed.

The task of breaking the truth to Liese was confided to Franz Lehmann, who was specially charged by the Major to spare "his niece,"—so he called her, and the words ran through poor Franz like an electric shock,—the pain of hearing all the most tragic part of her mother's story. By which the Major naturally meant all the facts which unequivocally revealed the villainy of her father. "Baron Dornberg acted ill,—

very ill; I don't deny it," said the Major. "But I really do believe that he repented at the last, and that, if time and strength had been granted him, he would have made reparation. You see he must always have retained some feeling of tenderness in his heart for his wife Barbara; witness the care with which he preserved her portrait throughout his life."

To all which Franz merely made answer that he hoped Baron Dornberg's tardy repentance had availed to obtain pardon above; though, for his part, he didn't much believe in folks who only began to be sorry when they couldn't possibly go on doing evil any longer. That, Papist or Protestant, he had no doubt the good priest Souka had done the best he could for him. And that as to Lieschen, the Major might rest quite easy in his mind that he,—Franz,—wouldn't trouble her pure spirit by a too detailed description of the conduct of her noble father; but would rather dwell on the sweetness, beauty, and affectionate nature of her peasant mother. Now, the sneer implied in those last words was, it must be owned, rather hard upon the Major, who certainly had been acting throughout with great magnanimity. But Von Groll paid not the least attention to it. Unfortunately, noblemen did occasionally prove to be vile, and their vileness was more deplorable and disgraceful than the vileness of others. Unfortunately, too, human

beings did sometimes degrade themselves below the level of the brutes. But, for all that, men were men, and horses were horses !

Little Liese listened with pale, scared face, and parted lips, through which the breath came quickly, to the revelation of her gentle birth and of the dignities that awaited her. She had begged that Sophie might be present during the telling of the "important tidings" which Cousin Franz said he had to communicate to her. And she sat, holding the old woman's hand in her own, whilst she listened. Farmer Lehmann's voice was frequently interrupted by loud exclamations of ecstatic surprise from Sophie, who gave utterance to "Ach's," and "Oh's," and invocations of "Du Lieber Himmel!" innumerable.

But Lieschen sat quite still and dumb. Only when the farmer put into her hands the portrait of her mother, which the Major had desired should be given to her, her breast heaved and her lips quivered, and she burst out crying. That was her mother!—her mother in all the exquisite bloom of youthful loveliness!—the poor mother whose dead, white face was among the earliest, as it was the most indelible, of her childish memories! This she could take hold of; this she could receive into her heart. It was linked with something tangible in her young life. The arrival of

Cousin Franz at Hanover;—the dimly-remembered journey in the waggon through a white, cold world;—everything had seemed white and cold then, except Cousin Franz;—and, lastly, the being carried in through the huge, dark barn, and being set down all strange and dizzy before the pile of blazing pine-logs in the kitchen of the farm at Horn. Yes; that was real.

But all the rest was a dream as yet. She a noble young lady! She, Liese Lehmann! The owner of wealth whose amount was fabulously vast in her eyes! Ach! let her take breath for a moment! It frightened her. It was a dream,—a strange dream. What;—that grave, awful gentleman was her uncle! What, that gnädige Frau who had inspired her with such intense dread and distant, humble reverence, was her aunt! Ach, Himmel! No, no; it was too impossible! Let them go away and leave her with Sophie. Sophie was real. Sophie was her good, true friend. Bitte, bitte; would they leave her quiet with Sophie? Sophie led her away, and unfastened the plaits of her hair, and loosened her girdle, and made her lie down on the sacristan's bed. Yes, on the Herr Küster's very own bed, with its red and black hangings. But that was not surprising. Nothing could ever be surprising any more!

She let Sophie do as she would with her, and lay quite still and passive on the bed. Presently she whispered, "Dear Sophie, would you give me mother's picture, and leave me quite by myself a bit?" And when the old woman was gone out of the room, she clasped the portrait in her arms and kissed it, and cried, "Oh, Otto! oh, Otto!" and wept softly. And then —she fell fast asleep with the picture lying against her breast!

Little Lieschen's mind was wearied out with the strain of trying to receive and realise these wonders that had been told to her; and little Lieschen's body, —never very strong, though sound and healthy,—had suffered somewhat lately from the spirit's constant wearing anxiety about her absent lover, and from the effort she had made to be brave and to seem cheerful. And the tired mind and the tired body took refuge in sleep, as a child hides its head in its mother's lap. But of course the waking had to come. And by degrees the absolute terror she had felt on first hearing the news of her changed lot wore off, and left only wonder and strangeness. These, too,—though they were slower in passing away,—did fade somewhat after a few days. Every one around her spoke of the wonderful story, and that helped to familiarise her with its aspect. She had seen the Major again, who had called her "my

dear Elisabeth," and had said to old Sophie that his niece must henceforth be addressed as Fräulein Dornberg.

The thought of Otto was never long absent from Liese's faithful breast. When she became sufficiently collected to consider what were the changes which this discovery would make in her life, the delightful idea dawned upon her that now, surely, there could be no obstacle to her marriage with Otto. If he were poor, no matter. She would be rich. She had no clear notion how long it would be before she should begin to enjoy this wonderful wealth; nor how it would come to her. But at least there could be no need that Otto should continue to wander far from his native place, and to lead the hard life of a soldier. She longed, above all things, to convey the news to him. But,—ach leider!—he was so far away. And in this dreadful war-time, how was she sure that a letter would reach him at all?

Sophie's simplicity was quite as great as Lieschen's; and the two built up all kinds of delightful things for Otto, without a suspicion that "Fräulein Dornberg" must necessarily be far removed from his sphere. The sacristan knew better, and dropped a word of warning to Liese on the subject. He could not make his warning very explicit, because he still adhered to his self-

imposed rule of avoiding the mention of Otto's name. But his words alarmed Liese, and set her thinking uneasily. Could they mean to part her from Otto,—these grand relations? To try to part her from Otto, that was; for nothing short of his own will should make her give him up. She trembled at the thought of her next meeting with the Major. But she had resolved, with all the strength of her love, to say some word to him about her betrothal. She remembered that the Major had spoken kindly of Otto, and had seemed to understand that the young man was very dear to her. But, then, that had been before——. Oh, dear! oh, dear! if Otto were only here! If he were only not so far away!

She sat herself down under the pear tree, beneath whose shade she had read his letter, and leant her head on her hand, and thought of him. As she so sat, Joachim Müller passed on the other side of the hedge, and pausing, leant over it to look at her. “You are all alone there,” said he at length; and then Liese raised her head, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes. “Ah!” he exclaimed, with a deep sigh, “you are not happy. Do you take no pleasure in your new fortune? Gott! if I had thought it was only to make you sorrowful, I would have died rather than told what I knew. But,—fool that I was,—why did I

not remember that nothing that I touched could bring good to any one?"

Liese was shocked to hear him speak so, and unselfishly tried to shake off her own melancholy mood to cheer him. She was only thinking of dear Otto, and wishing he were near. His absence, at all events, was not Joachim's fault. "He will come back, and you will both be happy,—if there is any happiness for good folks in this world!" Then Lieschen by degrees confessed that she had some reason to fear that her new-found relations would oppose her marriage with Otto.

Joachim heard with a troubled face. "You will be true to him?" said he. "They must yield if you are only true to him."

True to him? True to Otto? Why, what else could she be? True to her own, good, generous, noble Otto, who had given up so much for her sake? If she could be made a queen to-morrow, she would take off her crown and go to Otto very humbly and lay it at his feet; very humbly she would go, and yet proudly too, for how could the girl not be proud whom Otto loved? But it troubled her that she could not tell him all that was in her heart. She had written to him on the 13th of June, and had had no answer. That was before all this strange story had been re-

vealed. Who could tell if he had ever got the letter? Oh, if she could send a letter with wings, that would fly to him wherever he might be! Or, better still, if she had wings wherewith she might fly to him herself!

Joachim listened silently. Suddenly he said, "Will you do one thing for me? Will you put your little hand on the hedge there, and let me kiss it? I won't touch it with my black fist." Liese complied with child-like simplicity. The man bent his head over the small hand lying amongst the green leaves, and touched it with his lips. "God bless thee, child!" he said; "don't fret and fear. Thou'l not see me again for a while. I'm going to find Otto." And before she could say a word, he strode away, without once looking back, in the direction of the forest.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE GUARD IS RELIEVED.

We left Otto Hemmerich perched on the top of the belfry of Goldenau, and sustaining a state of siege there ;—a state of siege with the unusual circumstance that the besiegers were supplying the garrison with victual. For two days this singular state of things lasted, the sentinel being formally called upon, morning and evening, to yield himself up prisoner, and the burghers being as formally warned that on any failure in the supply of food the deadly needle-gun should do terrible execution on them and theirs. On the third day, a toil-worn wayfarer limped into Goldenau. He was footsore, ragged, dusty ; with long, unkempt locks hanging down on to his shoulders, and a queer, wild, shy manner. His first inquiries at the little ale-house were whether a detachment of the —th Prussian regiment of infantry was not stationed at Goldenau, and on being informed, with a sneer of triumph, that

they had gone away suddenly in the night season, and had not been seen there more, the stranger's disappointment was manifest.

“Mayhap you’re a ‘Preusse’ yourself?” said the landlord threateningly. “A spy,—who knows?”

“I’m neither Prussian nor spy,” said the traveller, perceiving that there might be some peril for him unless he convinced the Goldenauers that he in nowise belonged to the enemies of Austria. “I was servant to a nobleman at Vienna many years. I’m seeking some one at this moment on business connected with a noble Saxon family at Dornberg, near the Elbe. I’ve nought to do with Prussians.” This reply seemed to pacify the people of the ale-house, and the wayfarer was permitted to eat his bread and cheese in peace.

Presently a little white-headed boy came in, and asked for the rations, and with much ill-humour and swearing, a dish of food and a bottle of wine were put into the child’s hands. This incident led to some talk about the obdurate sentry on the belfry, and the revelation that the good folks of Goldenau in their anxiety to seize on a prisoner had undeniably “caught a Tartar.”

“And this sentry belongs to the —th Prussian regiment of foot, eh?”

“Ay, confound the cunning knave! But only wait

until some of our troops come up this way ! The tables will be turned,—Donnerwetter ! ”

The stranger sauntered out into the village street, and loitered about, watching for another glimpse of the boy Augustin. He looked up at the tower, and saw the dark form of the Prussian sentry standing out against the sky. The sentry’s back was towards the street; and it would have been highly dangerous to endeavour in any way to attract the soldier’s attention. Indeed, the insignificance and poverty of the stranger’s appearance had alone preserved him from molestation hitherto. Besides, how infinitely small was the chance that yonder sentry should prove to be the man he was in search of !

Presently little Augustin came trotting down the street, entered the ale-house to restore the empty dish, and then returned slowly past the stranger. The latter accosted him. At first the boy was shy, and would not speak; but by degrees he was drawn on to talk of the “Preusse” up aloft there,—and of the wonderful daws that haunted the belfry-steeple. “The Preusse isn’t wicked,” said the child, looking up wistfully into the stranger’s face. “He showed me the daws’ nests. The folk here think he’s wicked because he will have dinner every day,” pursued little Augustin, imputing what he supposed to be the true motive for the hostility

which this sentry had excited. "But it ain't wicked to have dinner every day, if you can get it. The Herr Bürgermeister has dinner and supper too."

"Do you know what this soldier's name is, Kleiner?"

"Nay; I call him 'Preusse.'"

"Has he blue eyes?"

"Yes; and a blue coat," responded Augustin innocently.

"Does he talk like you and the rest here?"

"Ach!" cried the child grinning, "he speaks so funny. Not like us. But he comes from a long way off. He's a woodsman; and he tells me tales of the forests and the beasts there. But I daren't stay with him very long;—only while he eats his dinner. But he would fain I stayed. 'Tis right lonesome up there;—ja, right lonesome!"

When Augustin next ascended the belfry to carry a bowl of milk and a slice of bread to the troublesome bird that the Goldenauers had caged in an evil hour, the child had concealed under his little patched coat a scrap of paper with these words scrawled on it,—"If you are whom I take you for, write your name on this, and give it to the boy. I am a friend, by this token of two women that were dear to you, Lotte and Liese.

"J. M."

When Otto beheld this unexpected writing, which

seemed to have fallen from the skies, he became much agitated. The writer could be no other than Joachim Müller. What had brought him hither? A thousand anxious thoughts chased each other through his mind; a thousand apprehensions that some evil had befallen his Lieschen; and, these made his solitary imprisonment intolerably irksome. He had neither pen nor pencil, but he pricked the word "Otto" on the paper with a pin discovered in Augustin's garments, and bade the child lose no time in delivering that secretly to the strange man who had accosted him.

The little fellow was proud of his trust, and promised to fulfil it faithfully. When the child had disappeared down the winding-stair, Otto's excitement rose to fever heat. He had half a mind, if speedy rescue did not arrive, to make a rush for it, and sallying forth from the postern-door when it should be opened to admit Augustin, try to regain his liberty by a coup-de-main. He wished to be faithful to his post, and to do his duty, but was he to remain there for ever? His comrades had abandoned him. His officers had forgotten him. And then Lieschen might be in peril or suffering! Oh, if he knew! If he only could know! And then he paced furiously up and down his narrow platform until he was fain to cease for very weariness. Meanwhile Augustin's second attempt at negotiation

did not fare so well as his first. Suspicion had been aroused. The child was watched, and just as he was about to deliver up to the stranger the scrap of paper entrusted to him, both himself and Joachim were seized by a posse of ardent Goldenauers, and haled to the presence of the Burgomaster. Here was a turn of the wheel! If the obdurate sentry on the belfry continued to defy them, at least they held his friend as hostage. In vain Joachim protested that his business with the soldier was utterly unconnected with things political and warlike. All that mattered little. The main thing was that they,—the Goldenauers,—had it now in their power to threaten reprisals in case the sentry should do any of their people any injury. They were elated with the assurance that the obdurate sentry must speedily yield, and with the proud thought that instead of one prisoner, they would now have two.

These pleasing anticipations, however, were interrupted by one who burst into the Burgomaster's sitting-room,—where Joachim and the child Augustin were still standing amidst a noisy crowd of citizens,—and announced the terrifying intelligence that the Prussians were coming back. A shepherd had seen the detachment, accompanied by some reinforcements, in full march along the high road to Goldenau. The miller, with politic sagacity, had already despatched a

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messenger to meet the returning heroes, and to offer their commanding officer any accommodation his house afforded. For it was as well to be on the safe side if, as appeared too certain, these blue-coated fellows were getting the upper hand everywhere.

The group of Goldenauers, but now so voluble and eager, were stricken with silence, and melted away with marvellous rapidity. Only the poor stout Burgomaster remained sitting, panic-struck and amazed, in his chair; pondering helplessly what manner of vengeance would overtake him for his conduct to the sentry, and feeling well convinced that if a scape-goat were needed for the sins of the community, his fellow-citizens would not hesitate to give him up for punishment. But the poor man was alarming himself needlessly. Punishment,—at least punishment of any very terrible kind,—was not destined to fall to his lot. Rumour indeed whispered somewhat of sundry exactions levied on the wealthier inhabitants of Goldenau; exactions from which the rich miller's policy and politeness by no means exempted him. But of these, this history having no trustworthy authority to go upon, says nothing. The Prussians had no time for entering into particular inquiries as to who had been principally concerned in the attempt to imprison their sentry, and probably no inclination to do so either.

When Otto descended from his airy station and appeared on the Platz, his comrades there assembled greeted him with a hearty ringing "hurrah!" And his captain said a few kind words applauding his fidelity and endurance. That was all. The explanation of his having been abandoned was simply that in the hurry of an unexpected summons he had been forgotten. An outpost stationed nearer to Zittau had received warning of an intended attack by a party of Austrian cavalry sent across the Bohemian frontier. Their commander had sent for assistance to the nearest Prussian detachment. The contemplated attack had not taken place, however, and Otto's regiment was now in full march southward to join the main body of Prince Frederick Charles's army corps. They were to remain but one night in Goldenau. That one night, however, was sufficient for Otto to learn from his cousin Joachim all the strange story respecting Lieschen which had come to light during his absence.

"God bless her true heart!" cried the lover, when Joachim related how Liese had spoken of him, and how it was her intense longing to let him know what had happened, and to hear from him, that had induced the charcoal-burner to set off in search of him. "And thanks to you, Cousin Joachim," added Otto, grasping Joachim's hand. "It was a true, friendly,—nay, more

than friendly act to make that journey to find me. There was some risk in it too. This part of the country is not pleasant to travel in just at this moment. And so my little Lieschen is a Fräulein? She could be neither dearer nor better in my eyes than she is,—not if she turned out to have the longest pedigree that ever was written. But it is for me to consider whether I should do right to hold her to her promise now that all is so changed. Think what I am, Cousin Joachim! A disinherited, penniless fellow that can find nothing better to do than to give his body to be shot at in exchange for meat and drink! A fine match for an heiress! ”

“ That sounds all very fine,” responded Joachim, “ and I can’t pretend to argue with you, but I know this, as sure as I know the sun’s in heaven;—if you talk of giving her up, you’ll break her heart.”

“ I won’t break her heart if I can help it,” answered Otto. “ And since she,—the sweet, innocent-hearted darling!—would have married me when she thought I was above her, as the world reckons, I’m not clear in my own mind that it wouldn’t be mean in me to say ‘ No; now I won’t marry you because the places are changed, and you have the thalers, and I have nothing.’ ”

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only know you'll break her heart if you give her up. She has her mother's nature; and her mother died broken-hearted, if ever woman did."

"But sieh'mal, Joachim! I am bound hard and fast. I must serve my time. Not that I grumble. Fighting is not the trade I'd prefer, but I do believe I'm on the right side for Fatherland. And then when you get among a lot of comrades, and hear day by day, and hour by hour, how the war is going, you can't help feeling strongly about it. All the same, I'd give more than I can tell to be able to go home even for an hour, and see my darling, and say a word to my uncle. I often think of the old man, Joachim; and I think of him without a spark of anger. Why, if there was nothing else, I should feel kindly towards him for his goodness to my Lieschen. He has a soft place in his heart, has Uncle Schnarcher. Look ye, cousin; they say there's a great battle toward, and we are to press on to join the main body of the army in Bohemia. Now, I—I—. Well, a bullet may find me as well as another, and if the worst happens, I charge you to give a message to Uncle Schnarcher. As to my Lieschen, she knows,—she knows that as long as my heart beats, I love her with all my strength. My last thought in all the world would be of her, if I knew I was dying. But the poor old man would be lonely, and perhaps he

until some of our troops come up this way! The tables will be turned,—Donnerwetter!"

The stranger sauntered out into the village street, and loitered about, watching for another glimpse of the boy Augustin. He looked up at the tower, and saw the dark form of the Prussian sentry standing out against the sky. The sentry's back was towards the street; and it would have been highly dangerous to endeavour in any way to attract the soldier's attention. Indeed, the insignificance and poverty of the stranger's appearance had alone preserved him from molestation hitherto. Besides, how infinitely small was the chance that yonder sentry should prove to be the man he was in search of!

Presently little Augustin came trotting down the street, entered the ale-house to restore the empty dish, and then returned slowly past the stranger. The latter accosted him. At first the boy was shy, and would not speak; but by degrees he was drawn on to talk of the "Preusse" up aloft there,—and of the wonderful daws that haunted the belfry-steeple. "The Preusse isn't wicked," said the child, looking up wistfully into the stranger's face. "He showed me the daws' nests. The folk here think he's wicked because he will have dinner every day," pursued little Augustin, imputing what he supposed to be the true motive for the hostility

which this sentry had excited. "But it ain't wicked to have dinner every day, if you can get it. The Herr Bürgermeister has dinner and supper too."

"Do you know what this soldier's name is, Kleiner?"

"Nay; I call him 'Preusse.'"

"Has he blue eyes?"

"Yes; and a blue coat," responded Augustin innocently.

"Does he talk like you and the rest here?"

"Ach!" cried the child grinning, "he speaks so funny. Not like us. But he comes from a long way off. He's a woodsman; and he tells me tales of the forests and the beasts there. But I daren't stay with him very long;—only while he eats his dinner. But he would fain I stayed. 'Tis right lonesome up there;—ja, right lonesome!"

When Augustin next ascended the belfry to carry a bowl of milk and a slice of bread to the troublesome bird that the Goldenauers had caged in an evil hour, the child had concealed under his little patched coat a scrap of paper with these words scrawled on it,—"If you are whom I take you for, write your name on this, and give it to the boy. I am a friend, by this token of two women that were dear to you, Lotte and Liese.

"J. M."

When Otto beheld this unexpected writing, which

seemed to have fallen from the skies, he became much agitated. The writer could be no other than Joachim Müller. What had brought him hither? A thousand anxious thoughts chased each other through his mind; a thousand apprehensions that some evil had befallen his Lieschen; and, these made his solitary imprisonment intolerably irksome. He had neither pen nor pencil, but he pricked the word "Otto" on the paper with a pin discovered in Augustin's garments, and bade the child lose no time in delivering that secretly to the strange man who had accosted him.

The little fellow was proud of his trust, and promised to fulfil it faithfully. When the child had disappeared down the winding-stair, Otto's excitement rose to fever heat. He had half a mind, if speedy rescue did not arrive, to make a rush for it, and sallying forth from the postern-door when it should be opened to admit Augustin, try to regain his liberty by a coup-de-main. He wished to be faithful to his post, and to do his duty, but was he to remain there for ever? His comrades had abandoned him. His officers had forgotten him. And then Lieschen might be in peril or suffering! Oh, if he knew! If he only could know! And then he paced furiously up and down his narrow platform until he was fain to cease for very weariness. Meanwhile Augustin's second attempt at negotiation

did not fare so well as his first. Suspicion had been aroused. The child was watched, and just as he was about to deliver up to the stranger the scrap of paper entrusted to him, both himself and Joachim were seized by a posse of ardent Goldenauers, and haled to the presence of the Burgomaster. Here was a turn of the wheel! If the obdurate sentry on the belfry continued to defy them, at least they held his friend as hostage. In vain Joachim protested that his business with the soldier was utterly unconnected with things political and warlike. All that mattered little. The main thing was that they,—the Goldenauers,—had it now in their power to threaten reprisals in case the sentry should do any of their people any injury. They were elated with the assurance that the obdurate sentry must speedily yield, and with the proud thought that instead of one prisoner, they would now have two.

These pleasing anticipations, however, were interrupted by one who burst into the Burgomaster's sitting-room,—where Joachim and the child Augustin were still standing amidst a noisy crowd of citizens,—and announced the terrifying intelligence that the Prussians were coming back. A shepherd had seen the detachment, accompanied by some reinforcements, in full march along the high road to Goldenau. The miller, with politic sagacity, had already despatched a

messenger to meet the returning heroes, and to offer their commanding officer any accommodation his house afforded. For it was as well to be on the safe side if, as appeared too certain, these blue-coated fellows were getting the upper hand everywhere.

The group of Goldenauers, but now so voluble and eager, were stricken with silence, and melted away with marvellous rapidity. Only the poor stout Burgomaster remained sitting, panic-struck and amazed, in his chair; pondering helplessly what manner of vengeance would overtake him for his conduct to the sentry, and feeling well convinced that if a scape-goat were needed for the sins of the community, his fellow-citizens would not hesitate to give him up for punishment. But the poor man was alarming himself needlessly. Punishment,—at least punishment of any very terrible kind,—was not destined to fall to his lot. Rumour indeed whispered somewhat of sundry exactions levied on the wealthier inhabitants of Goldenau; exactions from which the rich miller's policy and politeness by no means exempted him. But of these, this history having no trustworthy authority to go upon, says nothing. The Prussians had no time for entering into particular inquiries as to who had been principally concerned in the attempt to imprison their sentry, and probably no inclination to do so either.

When Otto descended from his airy station and appeared on the Platz, his comrades there assembled greeted him with a hearty ringing "hurrah!" And his captain said a few kind words applauding his fidelity and endurance. That was all. The explanation of his having been abandoned was simply that in the hurry of an unexpected summons he had been forgotten. An outpost stationed nearer to Zittau had received warning of an intended attack by a party of Austrian cavalry sent across the Bohemian frontier. Their commander had sent for assistance to the nearest Prussian detachment. The contemplated attack had not taken place, however, and Otto's regiment was now in full march southward to join the main body of Prince Frederick Charles's army corps. They were to remain but one night in Goldenau. That one night, however, was sufficient for Otto to learn from his cousin Joachim all the strange story respecting Lieschen which had come to light during his absence.

"God bless her true heart!" cried the lover, when Joachim related how Liese had spoken of him, and how it was her intense longing to let him know what had happened, and to hear from him, that had induced the charcoal-burner to set off in search of him. "And thanks to you, Cousin Joachim," added Otto, grasping Joachim's hand. "It was a true, friendly,—nay, more

than friendly act to make that journey to find me. There was some risk in it too. This part of the country is not pleasant to travel in just at this moment. And so my little Lieschen is a Fräulein? She could be neither dearer nor better in my eyes than she is,—not if she turned out to have the longest pedigree that ever was written. But it is for me to consider whether I should do right to hold her to her promise now that all is so changed. Think what I am, Cousin Joachim! A disinherited, penniless fellow that can find nothing better to do than to give his body to be shot at in exchange for meat and drink! A fine match for an heiress!"

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might feel some regret,—some self-reproach. You tell him, Joachim, from me, that I know now I was hasty and stubborn. Not altogether wrong, I believe, but rash. And tell him, too, that I thanked him for his care of the orphan boy, and that I humbly and sincerely asked his pardon for aught I have ever said or done to grieve him."

Joachim responded by a silent grasp of the hand, and there was no more said between them. For early in the morning the Prussians must be in motion southward from Goldenau, and let grief, or love, or joy reign as they will, sleep will always exact his tribute-dues from frail mortality.

In the meanwhile things were not standing still in distant Lippe-Detmold. Major von Groll had, of course, no intention of leaving his niece in the sacristan's cottage at Horn. He had been occupying himself very earnestly with plans for the disposal of the young lady. If Amalia would have received her kindly, all would have been smooth. But the "gnädige Frau" was still too furious at the loss of her inheritance to listen to such a proposition for an instant. If Ferdinand enjoyed ruin and disgrace,—as it appeared he did, for he had taken vast pains to find them,—she did not. Don't let them bring the little wretch near her! That was all. Major von Groll could of course have

exerted his marital authority so far as to insist that his wife should receive her niece into her house. But what exertion of marital authority would avail to prevent Amalia from rendering the girl's life a burden to her under those circumstances? Still it was clear that in any case Fräulein Dornberg could not be left in her present quarters.

Casting about in his mind for some help, a chance word recalled to his mind the great interest which Fräulein Bopp had appeared to take in Liese. Fräulein Bopp had not been seen at the Von Grolls' since the evening on which she had opened the morocco case, and ingenuously proclaimed the extraordinary resemblance between the portrait it contained, and Frau von Schleppers' pretty servant-maid. The poor spinster had put herself for ever beyond the pale of Frau von Groll's grace. Frau von Groll spoke of her as "that Bopp," and pronounced her to be the most impertinently meddlesome old maid in Germany.

The Major called on Fräulein Bopp without loss of time, and a very few words sufficed to settle that Liese should share the Fräulein's modest lodgings until some permanent arrangement could be made for her. Fräulein Bopp was overjoyed at the idea. The romance of Lieschen's story had entranced her. She was even sorry that her slender means rendered it necessary for

her to accept the payment for bed and board which the Major offered as delicately as he could. It would have delighted Fräulein Bopp to receive the orphan girl as her guest, and to treat her,—as with some pardonable obliviousness of chronology she told herself,—like a sister. But stern fate, and the small quantity of coffee and butter-brod that could be purchased for a groschen, prevented this.

However, the Major was only too glad to have found a safe and unexceptionably respectable asylum for Liese, until either this deplorable war should cease, and he could take her to Saxony, and place her in the care of a distant relative of her father's, an old chanoinesse who resided at Dornberg; or until time and his own influence should so far have softened his Amalia as to allow her to receive the orphan girl with kindness.

So the Major went to Horn, and proceeded to the sacristan's cottage, to inform his niece that she must return with him the next morning to Detmold. It was a sultry afternoon. The sun had been blazing all day out of a cloudless sky. The air was quite still, and the thirsty flowers in the sacristan's garden hung their heads languidly. The sweet herbs sent up a dry strong spicy smell. Nothing seemed to be moving but a brown velvet-coated bee that had gorged himself with luscious

juices and was sleepily buzzing over a bed of flowering thyme, and a pair of fluttering white butterflies. Doors and windows were open in the cottage, and Von Groll could hear the tones of the sacristan's voice reading a chapter in the Bible. The Major stopped reverently, unwilling to interrupt the evening devotions of the little household.

When the chapter ceased there was a low murmur of prayer. The sacristan prayed in short broken sentences for a blessing on all beneath that roof-tree; and then, in a still feebler tone, that the Lord would be pleased to protect all loved ones who were absent, and who might be exposed to any peculiar peril. And the two women responded "Amen!" Then Liese's sweet small voice clove the summer air with a silver sound. She sang the hymn, "Breit aus die Flügel beide,"—"Spread out thy wings,"—which turns on the beautiful Scripture simile of the Lord sheltering his children, as a hen gathers her chickens beneath her wings. Here and there Sophie put in a quavering note in her trembling old voice; and the Major stood bareheaded in the sunshine, and listened until the hymn was done. And whilst he listened and the notes of the hymn came floating out into the peaceful old-fashioned garden,—at that very moment the great guns were thundering over Sadowa, and the air was thick and

stifling with their deadly breath; and the victorious Prussians, who had been engaged in mortal conflict since eight o'clock in the morning, were pursuing the remnants of the Austrian army, now in full retreat from the fatal field.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

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admit the truth, were compelled to own that now there could be no longer any doubt as to which side fortune favoured in this great struggle. Those who rejoiced in the result of the bloody day of Sadowa protested that, not blind Fortune, but keen-sighted sagacity and matchless armaments had determined the victory. Turn we to the narrow circle of persons whose acquaintance we have made in the little principality of Lippe-Detmold, and who are soon about to say "farewell" to the courteous reader.

Throughout the small territory the greatest excitement prevailed, and news was eagerly sought for. Our friends at the Pied Lamb, at Horn, wagged their heads wonderingly at the news. The horse-faced man,—always sparing of speech,—became absolutely speechless; but was impressive in his speechlessness by means of an extraordinary power which he developed of conveying an intensely concentrated meaning into his nod. He shut his eyes very tight; fixed his pipe firmly between his teeth; and then tossed his head up and down many times in succession, with a thoroughly equine movement. The impression made by this gesture on his friends was no whit diminished by their having not the slightest idea what it was he meant them to understand by it.

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of trade. Prussian or Austrian, all men must drink ; ay, and excepting some few benighted persons not worth mentioning, all men must smoke. Why then dispute and argue ? The war would speedily come to an end. So he was told. Hitherto, things had gone pretty smoothly in Horn, in spite of the fighting. He was of opinion that if each man would mind his own business, and ignore the business of his neighbour, the world would go well. But if any gentleman present differed from him he was at liberty to call for, and add to his score, a bumper of the best wine that his, Quendel's, cellar afforded, and drink to his own particular opinions. A handsome and liberal-minded offer was this, which no citizen of Horn had the spirit to accept. In these days Herr Peters rose to the very apex of social distinction. The good people of Horn were,—to parody Napoleon's somewhat irreverent dictum that Providence is always on the side of the great battalions,—unanimously on the side of the winning army. Success was worshipped with very naïve sincerity in Horn. But then Horn is a small, insignificant, benighted place ; by no means like,—like,—in short, by no means like any of those numerous highly-civilised and well-known communities in which success, irrespective of desert, is not worshipped at all.

The company at the Speise-Saal of the Pied Lamb

was deprived of its chief member in the person of the venerable sacristan of St. Mary's, who had deserted it for some weeks. But perhaps, all things considered, this was not altogether to be regretted. For Simon Schnarcher was, to do him justice, no success-worshipper. He clung to his old notions with loyal tenacity; and it was observable that Herr Peters, formerly so argumentative in his mild way on the subject of politics, would now endure to hear the sacristan put forth the most retrograde and anti-liberal doctrines without uttering a word of protest. At least he did so until old Sophie, cunning-simple in her love for her old master, said to him one day, "Ach bitte, Herr Peters! do ye now contradict the Herr Küster now and then. He's been used to get the better of folks in argument all his days, has the Herr Küster; and how can he do it if nobody won't argue against him? And I'm sure he needs something to raise his spirits, and us all in such trouble with not knowing what has become of our poor dear boy in all their murdering battles!" And poor, faithful Sophie put her apron to her eyes. After which hint the kindly Herr Peters made a point of "being got the better of in argument" by his old friend. It was lonely and sad enough at this time in the sacristan's cottage; for Lieschen, who had brightened it like a ray of sunshine, was gone. Her

grand, high-born uncle had taken her away to Detmold.

Before leaving Horn, Lieschen had dutifully gone up to the farm to pay her greeting to Cousin Hanne. She had not visited the Hausfrau since entering Schnarcher's service. But under her changed circumstances, the girl's natural delicacy of feeling prompted her to omit no mark of respect to her mother's relatives. She had gone, then, to the farm ; and Hanne had received her in a half-kind, half-cool manner. She had said, well,—she supposed Liese would be contented now, at any rate !—As though the girl had long been fretfully hankering after the honour of being proved to be a baron's daughter, and had achieved it at last. And she added that it might turn out for good, or it might not ; but that one comfort was, she, Hanne, now washed her hands of all responsibility in the matter ;—a species of ablution which, it appeared to most people, Providence had already seen fit to render entirely superfluous.

Liese was consigned to the care of Fräulein Bopp ; and the latter lady was strictly cautioned by the Major not to encourage his niece in any foolish love-lorn fancies, having reference to a certain Otto Hemmerich, —a good young fellow in his way, said the Major, and one who had not been altogether well treated in Det-

mold, considering his father's long and faithful services to the Prince as Head-ranger, but one with whom it was out of the question for Fräulein Elisabeth Dornberg to think of forming an alliance. For Lieschen had summoned courage to tell Major von Groll,—whom she found insurmountable difficulty in addressing as “uncle,”—that she was Otto Hemmerich's betrothed, that she loved nobody but him, and that, come what might, she was resolved to be true to him, and to marry him if he remained true to her, and if,—if,—ach Gott! if he came back safe from the wars.

It is to be feared that Fräulein Bopp, although honestly desirous to do her duty, was not altogether the strictest and sternest duenna that could have been selected under the circumstances. For the soft-hearted lady could not but sympathise with the lover's romantic story, and was more apt to weep with Liese than to scold her, or to lecture her about the dignity of her position.

The time that Liese passed in Fräulein Bopp's tiny lodging in Detmold was a period, at first, of profound depression, and, later, of harrowing and still increasing anxiety. Rumours of great battles seemed to darken the very air, like birds of ill omen. Night and day the dread haunted her heart,—and, alas, how many other loving hearts in Germany!—that at that hour,

at that moment, her own love, her husband, might be writhing in pain and fever, or stretched stark and stiff on the cold earth. Oh, it was dreadful! too terrible to be true! Many a night did the poor child start from uneasy slumbers in her own little bed, and, rushing to her gentle-natured hostess, throw herself trembling into the good woman's arms, and cry out that he was dead, dead, dead,—her Otto, killed, murdered, with a cruel bullet in his breast! And the pitiful Fräulein would forget all about Liese's ancestors, and would soothe and comfort her, and bid her hope, until the girl sobbed herself to sleep again by her side. Then came the news of Sadowa; and still no tidings of Otto, no tidings of Joachim! Liese, in the pain of her gnawing anxiety, was unjust to the poor charcoal-burner. Why could he not have written, at least? Why not have sent a word? He must have found Otto,—he must! Oh, she would have found him if she could have been let go and seek him! But Joachim did not love him. Nobody loved him, except her,—nobody! They were all cruel and hard-hearted, and had driven him away. And then, the next moment, she would pray to be forgiven those harsh, unjust words, and moan out that sorrow was making her wicked, and that when Otto came back he would not be able to love her any more. So passed away the time until the end of the month,

and then it was known that peace was as good as settled. But still neither of Otto nor his cousin did any news reach Detmold.

One evening Lieschen was sitting alone in Fräulein Bopp's little drawing-room, the good spinster herself being engaged in superintending the preparation of the supper, in conjunction with her old waiting-maid. Lieschen had some knitting in her fingers, but she was not even feigning to work. There she sat, idly staring out of the window at the sky, now beginning to be stained with red sunset colours. Presently, Fräulein Bopp opened the door, and stood quite still, looking at the girl. Lieschen neither spoke nor stirred. "Elisabeth!" said Fräulein Bopp at last; and a tremor in her voice seemed suddenly to communicate itself to Lieschen's frame. Her hands shook, and the work dropped from them. "My dear Elisabeth, listen to me quietly. Joachim Müller——"

"Is he here?" grasped out Lieschen, quite hoarsely. She tried to stand up, but could not.

"Yes, my dear, darling Elisabeth, he is here; and, —listen, dear child,—he,—he brings good news. He has seen his cousin, Otto Hemmerich, and——"

With a shrill, piercing cry, that rang through the little house, and that sounded in Fräulein Bopp's ears whenever she thought of the scene afterwards all her

life long, Liese sprang towards the door. She no longer trembled; she was no longer weak; she gave a great, strong bound, that carried her across the room, and calling out, “Otto! Otto! Otto!” fell into her lover’s arms, and was pressed to his throbbing heart.

I must briefly explain by what means Otto was thus enabled to return to Detmold, and then my story will be nearly told. The narrative of his feat of sustaining a siege single-handed on the belfry of Goldenau had reached the ears of high and mighty personages,—chiefs, glorious in war and illustrious in their social greatness. After the day of Sadowa,—in which Otto, though in the thick of the fight, escaped quite scathless,—he was sent for to appear in a princely presence, and interrogated as to the particulars of his exploit at Goldenau. Otto told his story with manfulness and modesty, and evidently made a favourable impression on his illustrious hearers. He was promised promotion and rewards, but an expression in his face called forth the inquiry whether he were dissatisfied with what was to be done for him.

Dissatisfied! Ach behüte! How could he be dissatisfied? It would be a generous acknowledgment for much greater deeds than his; for, after all, those villagers were not over brave. A couple of resolute

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of trade. Prussian or Austrian, all men must drink ; ay, and excepting some few benighted persons not worth mentioning, all men must smoke. Why then dispute and argue ? The war would speedily come to an end. So he was told. Hitherto, things had gone pretty smoothly in Horn, in spite of the fighting. He was of opinion that if each man would mind his own business, and ignore the business of his neighbour, the world would go well. But if any gentleman present differed from him he was at liberty to call for, and add to his score, a bumper of the best wine that his, Quendel's, cellar afforded, and drink to his own particular opinions. A handsome and liberal-minded offer was this, which no citizen of Horn had the spirit to accept. In these days Herr Peters rose to the very apex of social distinction. The good people of Horn were,—to parody Napoleon's somewhat irreverent dictum that Providence is always on the side of the great battalions,—unanimously on the side of the winning army. Success was worshipped with very naïve sincerity in Horn. But then Horn is a small, insignificant, benighted place ; by no means like,—like,—in short, by no means like any of those numerous highly-civilised and well-known communities in which success, irrespective of desert, is not worshipped at all.

The company at the Speise-Saal of the Pied Lamb

was deprived of its chief member in the person of the venerable sacristan of St. Mary's, who had deserted it for some weeks. But perhaps, all things considered, this was not altogether to be regretted. For Simon Schnarcher was, to do him justice, no success-worshipper. He clung to his old notions with loyal tenacity ; and it was observable that Herr Peters, formerly so argumentative in his mild way on the subject of politics, would now endure to hear the sacristan put forth the most retrograde and anti-liberal doctrines without uttering a word of protest. At least he did so until old Sophie, cunning-simple in her love for her old master, said to him one day, "Ach bitte, Herr Peters ! do ye now contradict the Herr Küster now and then. He's been used to get the better of folks in argument all his days, has the Herr Küster ; and how can he do it if nobody won't argue against him ? And I'm sure he needs something to raise his spirits, and us all in such trouble with not knowing what has become of our poor dear boy in all their murdering battles !" And poor, faithful Sophie put her apron to her eyes. After which hint the kindly Herr Peters made a point of "being got the better of in argument" by his old friend. It was lonely and sad enough at this time in the sacristan's cottage ; for Lieschen, who had brightened it like a ray of sunshine, was gone. Her

grand, high-born uncle had taken her away to Detmold.

Before leaving Horn, Lieschen had dutifully gone up to the farm to pay her greeting to Cousin Hanne. She had not visited the Hausfrau since entering Schnarcher's service. But under her changed circumstances, the girl's natural delicacy of feeling prompted her to omit no mark of respect to her mother's relatives. She had gone, then, to the farm ; and Hanne had received her in a half-kind, half-cool manner. She had said, well,—she supposed Liese would be contented now, at any rate!—As though the girl had long been fretfully hankering after the honour of being proved to be a baron's daughter, and had achieved it at last. And she added that it might turn out for good, or it might not ; but that one comfort was, she, Hanne, now washed her hands of all responsibility in the matter ;—a species of ablution which, it appeared to most people, Providence had already seen fit to render entirely superfluous.

Liese was consigned to the care of Fräulein Bopp ; and the latter lady was strictly cautioned by the Major not to encourage his niece in any foolish love-lorn fancies, having reference to a certain Otto Hemmerich, —a good young fellow in his way, said the Major, and one who had not been altogether well treated in Det-

mold, considering his father's long and faithful services to the Prince as Head-ranger, but one with whom it was out of the question for Fräulein Elisabeth Dornberg to think of forming an alliance. For Lieschen had summoned courage to tell Major von Groll,—whom she found insurmountable difficulty in addressing as “uncle,”—that she was Otto Hemmerich's betrothed, that she loved nobody but him, and that, come what might, she was resolved to be true to him, and to marry him if he remained true to her, and if,—if,—ach Gott! if he came back safe from the wars.

It is to be feared that Fräulein Bopp, although honestly desirous to do her duty, was not altogether the strictest and sternest duenna that could have been selected under the circumstances. For the soft-hearted lady could not but sympathise with the lover's romantic story, and was more apt to weep with Liese than to scold her, or to lecture her about the dignity of her position.

The time that Liese passed in Fräulein Bopp's tiny lodging in Detmold was a period, at first, of profound depression, and, later, of harrowing and still increasing anxiety. Rumours of great battles seemed to darken the very air, like birds of ill omen. Night and day the dread haunted her heart,—and, alas, how many other loving hearts in Germany!—that at that hour,

at that moment, her own love, her husband, might be writhing in pain and fever, or stretched stark and stiff on the cold earth. Oh, it was dreadful! too terrible to be true! Many a night did the poor child start from uneasy slumbers in her own little bed, and, rushing to her gentle-natured hostess, throw herself trembling into the good woman's arms, and cry out that he was dead, dead, dead,—her Otto, killed, murdered, with a cruel bullet in his breast! And the pitiful Fräulein would forget all about Liese's ancestors, and would soothe and comfort her, and bid her hope, until the girl sobbed herself to sleep again by her side. Then came the news of Sadowa; and still no tidings of Otto, no tidings of Joachim! Liese, in the pain of her gnawing anxiety, was unjust to the poor charcoal-burner. Why could he not have written, at least? Why not have sent a word? He must have found Otto,—he must! Oh, she would have found him if she could have been let go and seek him! But Joachim did not love him. Nobody loved him, except her,—nobody! They were all cruel and hard-hearted, and had driven him away. And then, the next moment, she would pray to be forgiven those harsh, unjust words, and moan out that sorrow was making her wicked, and that when Otto came back he would not be able to love her any more. So passed away the time until the end of the month,

and then it was known that peace was as good as settled. But still neither of Otto nor his cousin did any news reach Detmold.

One evening Lieschen was sitting alone in Fräulein Bopp's little drawing-room, the good spinster herself being engaged in superintending the preparation of the supper, in conjunction with her old waiting-maid. Lieschen had some knitting in her fingers, but she was not even feigning to work. There she sat, idly staring out of the window at the sky, now beginning to be stained with red sunset colours. Presently, Fräulein Bopp opened the door, and stood quite still, looking at the girl. Lieschen neither spoke nor stirred. "Elisabeth!" said Fräulein Bopp at last; and a tremor in her voice seemed suddenly to communicate itself to Lieschen's frame. Her hands shook, and the work dropped from them. "My dear Elisabeth, listen to me quietly. Joachim Müller——"

"Is he here?" grasped out Lieschen, quite hoarsely. She tried to stand up, but could not.

"Yes, my dear, darling Elisabeth, he is here; and, —listen, dear child,—he,—he brings good news. He has seen his cousin, Otto Hemmerich, and——"

With a shrill, piercing cry, that rang through the little house, and that sounded in Fräulein Bopp's ears whenever she thought of the scene afterwards all her

life long, Liese sprang towards the door. She no longer trembled; she was no longer weak; she gave a great, strong bound, that carried her across the room, and calling out, “Otto! Otto! Otto!” fell into her lover’s arms, and was pressed to his throbbing heart.

I must briefly explain by what means Otto was thus enabled to return to Detmold, and then my story will be nearly told. The narrative of his feat of sustaining a siege single-handed on the belfry of Goldenau had reached the ears of high and mighty personages,—chiefs, glorious in war and illustrious in their social greatness. After the day of Sadowa,—in which Otto, though in the thick of the fight, escaped quite scathless,—he was sent for to appear in a princely presence, and interrogated as to the particulars of his exploit at Goldenau. Otto told his story with manfulness and modesty, and evidently made a favourable impression on his illustrious hearers. He was promised promotion and rewards, but an expression in his face called forth the inquiry whether he were dissatisfied with what was to be done for him.

Dissatisfied! Ach behüte! How could he be dissatisfied? It would be a generous acknowledgment for much greater deeds than his; for, after all, those villagers were not over brave. A couple of resolute

men might have taken him. No ; far from dissatisfied ; but,—if he might choose——.

Let him speak freely.

Well, then, he had enlisted as a regular soldier. In the ordinary course of things he must of necessity serve out his time. But as it seemed now that the enemy had had pretty nearly enough of it,—not but what he thought his Austrian fellow-countrymen had fought grandly,—and peace would most likely not be long in coming, and as he had weighty and urgent reasons for wishing to be back in his own home again, the boon he would crave, since they condescended kindly to ask him, would be that on the conclusion of the war he should be discharged from further service and allowed to return to Detmold. “And,” said Otto, in conclusion, with a naïve earnestness that raised a good-humoured smile on every face around, “if you set me free now, you’ll not lose a soldier ; for I give my word as an honest man and a true German, that whenever the black and white flag flies again for Fatherland, I’ll come and fight under it as long as my arm can carry a rifle.”

Without binding him by any such promise, however, Otto’s request was granted. A shrewd old general, very near the person of Majesty, remarked that a few such young fellows scattered through the land would

do much for the Prussian greatness and prosperity. "We soldiers win Sadowas," said the general, "but 'tis your citizen fellows must make them worth the winning."

Of Liese's joy and thankfulness, Otto's rapture at being with her once more, and Fräulein Bopp's sympathetic friendship, I need say nothing. Fräulein Bopp,—I am compelled in my character of faithful chronicler to confess,—deserted from the Major's colours, and went over, bag and baggage, to the enemy. Such a pair of lovers must not, could not, should not be separated!

Otto's reception at Horn was quite festal. There was one solemn scene in the sacristan's cottage when the young man knelt at his uncle's feet and begged him to take off the ban he had laid upon him in his wrath; and old Simon Schnarcher raised his withered hands above his nephew's head, and prayed aloud, saying:—"Oh, merciful Lord and Father, forgive, I beseech thee, in thy loving clemency, the rash and wicked words that fell from thy servant's lips. Thou, Lord, who readest all hearts, knowest that even when I spoke them the boy was dear and precious to me. Bless him, oh, Father! and bless also the pure woman whom he loves. And forgive,—forgive us,—our trespasses, Lord,—as we,—forgive——" And then the

aged man wept aloud and fell on Otto's breast. And those tears were the sweetest and most blessed that Simon Schnarcher's eyes had shed for the space of a long lifetime,—ever since he had wept over his mother's dead face.

But all the other incidents of Otto's return to Horn were joyous, not to say comic, in their character. Public opinion already held him very high, from the moment in which a local paper reprinted a paragraph that had gone the round of the Prussian journals, and which was headed, "Brave resistance of a Prussian sentry. A whole population kept at bay by one man!" For it was known that Otto was the hero in question. But what was this to the excitement that prevailed when one day a letter, sealed with an enormous coat-of-arms, and bearing evidence of its magnificently, and, indeed, unspeakably, illustrious origin, arrived addressed to Otto, and informed him that his Highness the Prince of Detmold had heard with great pleasure, from a very exalted personage, of the gallant conduct of one of his subjects in an incident of the late war, and having made particular inquiries as to the name and history of the Detmolder who had thus distinguished himself, his Highness had confided to his private secretary,—the writer of the letter,—the pleasing task of informing Herr Otto Hemmerich that he was thence-

forth to consider himself installed in the post of Head-ranger of the Detmold woods and forests, as held by his late father, whose services the Prince held in cordial and grateful remembrance?

It was superb. Horn felt that it had played a part,—and no insignificant part either,—in the great campaign of 1866. To Otto, the kind words about his father seemed the most precious in all the letter. After a confidential colloquy with Liese, Otto lost no time in seeking Major von Groll and laying his prospects before that gentleman. Otto had a plan to propose which appeared to him to combine a great many advantages, and to which he begged the Major to give his best consideration. The plan was simply this. That the Von Grolls should reside on the Dornberg estates in Saxony, and possess them during their lives. After their decease, the property would of course revert to Liese. Otto felt that some acknowledgment was due to Von Groll for his disinterested and honourable conduct, and he added that neither Liese nor himself desired to deprive the “gnädige Frau,” his wife, of the joys of that inheritance on which she had so evidently set her heart.

The Major demurred. But Amalia, who had got an inkling of the proposition, gave him no peace until he consented. “ ‘Tis the least the hussy can do for us,”

said Amalia Wilhelmina, geboren Dornberg. So Liese and Otto took possession of the old hunting-lodge, which once more shone with the ruddy fire-light of home, and echoed to the sweet sounds of home voices.

The Major could not quite reconcile himself to his niece's marriage. But, as he said, Liese's insensibility to the claims of rank was doubtless in her blood; one of the sad consequences of her father's deplorable mésalliance. Once a year the Major has promised to come and enjoy his favourite pastime of hunting in the Detmold woods; and, up to the time of this present writing, he has done so, each year being the guest of Head-ranger Otto Hemmerich.

When Major von Groll went away into Saxony, at the conclusion of the war, the post of land-steward remained vacant for a time. But, to everybody's great surprise, the Justizrath von Schleppers did not get it. It was bestowed on a stranger, who conducted the business of his office with hard, dry impartiality; and who examined the Justizrath's accounts in an uncomfortably microscopic manner. But Von Schleppers was never heard to utter a word of complaint. And people would tell you it was plain how hardly the poor Justizrath had been used, since every soul who knew him got an impression,—they couldn't say how,—that he had been sacrificed owing to his too open

and confiding cast of mind. And he never, never complained!

Frau Mathilde occasionally makes little visits to the hunting-lodge, and appears thoroughly to enjoy instructing young Frau Hemmerich in various house-wifely and matronly duties. She is magnificently patronising on all such occasions. But as neither Otto nor Lieschen in the least resent this, and as they have really a kindly feeling towards Liese's old mistress, all goes smoothly; only they sometimes indulge in a little banter about the famous pink satin note-paper, which banter, although Frau Mathilde secretly fears it is scarcely respectful, she yet takes in good part.

Fräulein Bopp is the cherished friend of all at the hunting-lodge; and when, last winter, a little red-faced boy appeared in the Hemmerichs' family circle, the Fräulein displayed so remarkable a talent for amusing and playing with that pulpy young tyrant as surprised even those who knew her most intimately. When last I had news from Horn, Herr Quendel was gathered to his fathers. The rest of the habitués of the Spiese-Saal survived; but the house was shorn of its ancient glories, and no such meetings as I have chronicled took place in it any more.

Joachim Müller had the run of Otto's home. But he never was quite cured of his solitary, shy ways.

Sometimes he would be absent whole weeks in the woods. And one day, within a year of Otto's marriage, the poor charcoal-burner was found dead beneath a spreading oak tree. He seemed to have died quite quietly; but they found something clenched in his hand, and, opening the dead fingers, found them to contain a long tress of Lieschen's brown hair, which old Sophie confessed to having cut off for him.

"Poor creature!" said Sophie; "I do believe that he sometimes wasn't quite right in his head. That brain-fever he had never was quite cured, to my thinking; and, at times, I'll swear he fancied Lieschen was her poor mother come to life again! Lord be gracious to him! There's worse folks on God's earth than poor Joachim!"

Simon Schnarcher removed to his nephew's house, and was of course accompanied by the faithful Sophie. His cottage and bit of garden land in Horn are at present rented by Herr Peters, who has retired from business. But Simon destines them, as well as whatever money he has saved, to come to the pulpy young tyrant aforesaid. The old man is considerably upwards of eighty; but,—excepting an occasional attack of his old foe, the rheumatism,—continues to be wonderfully well and strong. And as he is most dutifully considered and respected by Otto and Lieschen, and all their

dependants, he does not feel that he has ceased to be "master." When the autumn twilight is long, and the leaves begin to fall, and a red glow from the broad hearth shines blithely out into the black shadow of the forest, there are few places more inviting than the hospitable kitchen of the old hunting-lodge, and few families more cheerfully contented than the "Sacristan's Household."

THE END.



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